

**Block****3****READING AND WRITING SKILLS**

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## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

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This Block concentrates on the **Reading and Writing Skills**. In Unit 1, (The Reading Skill) we discuss some of the strategies used by good readers. We also give you an insight into the characteristics of Readings and Levels of Meaning in a text. Unit 2 (Vocabulary Development) discusses ways to improve your vocabulary.

In Unit 3 and 4, we concentrate on the Writing Skill, beginning with the basics of writing to formal letters.

We hope you enjoyed reading the Block and completed all the exercises.

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# **UNIT 1 THE READING SKILL**

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## **Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
  - 1.1 Introduction
  - 1.2 Reasons for Reading
  - 1.3 The Reading Process
  - 1.4 Strategies Used by Good Readers
  - 1.5 Characteristics of Reading
  - 1.6 Levels of Meaning
  - 1.7 Reading Problems
  - 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
  - 1.9 Answers
- 

## **1.1 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit you should be able to:

- discuss and describe the different approaches to reading;
  - identify and list out the different purposes of reading English as a second language in India;
  - explain the skills involved in reading;
  - employ various strategies for improving reading; and
  - practice different tasks and activities to develop the reading skills.
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## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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When we say we are educated and *know* a language, the first question we would be asked is ‘can you speak, *read* and write in it?’ Reading has been recognized to be one of the primary skills to be mastered in a language. Perhaps that is the reason why it has been given a lot of importance from the early stages of learning. It is believed, and rightly too, that reading can open up a wealth of information and knowledge to young learners. As students we need to know how to improve our reading skills. In this unit we shall study about reading skills and how to practice and develop them through tasks and activities. We shall examine how the purposes of reading are related to both *what* we read and *how* we read.

## **1.2 REASONS FOR READING**

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Take a piece of paper and, in about five minutes, list all the different kinds of things you have read during the last five days or so, in any language – time-table, notices, letters, etc. How many of the things on your list were actually in English? Now think about the things you have listed. You must have included even things like menu of a restaurant, labels on medicine bottles, engagement diary and instruction leaflets. Why did you read each one? What did you want to

get from it? Were you interested in the pronunciation of what you read? Or were you interested in the grammatical structures used? Most probably, you read them because you wanted to get something from the writing: facts, ideas, information, enjoyment, even fellow feeling. You will thus find that you had a variety of reasons for reading, and if you compared notes with other people, you would find different reasons again. All these are **authentic** reasons for reading, that is, reasons that are not concerned with language learning as such, but with the uses to which we put reading in our daily lives outside the classroom.

Can we list some of the reasons why we read in our daily life? We normally read because

- a) we want information for some purpose, or because we are curious to know about some topic, the answer to a question, or the solution to a problem;
- b) we need instructions in order to perform some task in our workplace or in our daily life (we want to know how an appliance works or how to make a model airplane. We are interested in a new recipe for baking a cake; we have to fill in forms).
- c) we want to keep in touch with friends through messages, or understand official correspondence;
- d) we want to know when or where something will take place or what is available (we consult timetables, programmes, announcements, notices, and menus, or we read advertisement);
- e) we want to know what is happening or has happened (newspapers, magazines, reports);
- f) we want to play a new game, do a puzzle, act in a play, or do some other activity which is pleasant, amusing and enjoyable;
- g) we seek enjoyment or excitement (short stories, novels, songs, and poems). The term ‘reading’ thus embraces a wide variety of tasks, activities, skills and mental process.

Reading also occurs at different levels. A child may read easy material fluently without help. S/he may also read more difficult material, calling for concentration and special effort. S/he may read materials which require outside help such as instruction by the teacher.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) What are the different kinds of materials we normally read in our daily life?

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- 2) How is ‘reading’ traditionally used in the classroom?

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- 3) Mention at least five purposes for which we read in real life.

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- 4) Why do you think we need to learn ‘reading’ as a skill?

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### **1.3 THE READING PROCESS**

Let us try to understand what ‘reading’ means. As a first step, it might be useful to find out what you think about reading. Here are some statements about reading. Which of these statements do you think are true? Which of them are false? Can you explain why you think so?

- 1) Reading involves looking at a text and saying the words to yourself
- 2) Reading involves putting the words in print on the page into sentences and making sense of them.
- 3) To understand a word, you have to read all the letters in it, to understand a sentence you have to read all the words in it.
- 4) To understand a text, you need to know the meaning of all the words in the text.
- 5) The teacher can help students to read a text by reading it aloud while they follow the text in their books.

- 6) When we read for meaning, we do not need to read every letter of every word, nor every word in each sentence.
- 7) There are no major differences between how one reads in one's mother tongue and how one reads in a second or foreign language.

What is actually involved in the process of reading?

It is important to understand this if we really want to develop reading skills in a second or foreign language (or in any language for that matter). If we know how 'efficient readers' read, either in their own mother tongue or another language, perhaps we can use some of the techniques employed by these readers to acquire the reading skills.

In considering the reading process, first we have to distinguish between two quite separate activities: **reading for meaning** (or 'silent reading') and **reading aloud**. Think of your own experience as a student. In many classrooms, the reading lesson is used as an opportunity to teach pronunciation and encourage 'expression speaking', i.e., speaking with feeling and emotion. For early readers, reading aloud is of course an important aid; beginners have to discover how reading is associated with the spoken words they have already learnt to use. But the early reading stage does not last long — normally, two or three years at the most. Do children have to read aloud after that? If they do, what are the contexts in which they may be required to do it?

For most of us, once we have passed the early reading stage, reading aloud is not an activity we engage in outside the classroom, unless of course, we are actors/actresses or newsreaders. The purpose of reading aloud is not just to understand a text but to convey the information to someone else who has no access to it, such as reading out parts of a newspaper article to a friend, or reading a notice to other people who cannot see it clearly, or reading to someone who has lost his/her spectacles.

Obviously, reading aloud involves looking at a text, understanding it, and also saying it. It is a much more difficult activity than reading silently because our attention is divided between reading and speaking. We often stumble and make mistakes when reading aloud in our own language, and reading aloud in another language is even more difficult. Moreover, it slows down the reading process and may even affect comprehension to a certain extent.

Reading for meaning, on the other hand, is the activity we normally engage in when we read books, newspapers, road signs, posters, etc.; it is what you are doing as you read this Unit. It involves looking at sentences in a text and understanding the message they convey, in other words, making sense of a written text. It does not normally involve saying the words we read, not even silently inside our heads.

Now read the first part of the text **silently**.

### **The Discovery of Penicillin**

Pasteur discovered germs and Lister killed them. These two men together revolutionized the theory and practice of medicine. Germs can be destroyed by heat. They can be poisoned by certain chemicals called antiseptics. Carbolic acid is one such antiseptic used by Lister. The object of antiseptic method was

to stop germs from entering the body. But the cure of disease was a more difficult problem, for here the germs had already entered the body. It means that injecting carbolic acid into the body in as much a dose as would kill all the germs, would kill the patient also. It was a bacteriologist named Matchnikoff, a pupil of Pasteur, who revealed the true nature of the problem. He discovered the white cells of the blood, which are called leucocytes. He showed that these cells run out to join battle with the germs, like soldiers answering a bugle-call. It was necessary to find something that would attack only the germs and not destroy the fighting leucocytes. The man who took up the problem was Alexander Fleming.

Now read the second part **aloud**, or follow while someone else reads it aloud to you.

As luck would have it, Sir Almroth Wright and Fleming worked together. They had some doubts with regard to the efficacy of injecting antiseptics. They felt that the surgeon's aim should be not so much to kill the germs with an outside agent as to help the leucocytes to do their natural germ-killing work. And in 1922, after about 20 years of research, they discovered an antiseptic manufactured by the body. Wright made the discovery by what he modestly called an accident. He was suffering from Catarrh and began to examine his own nasal secretions, cultivating them on plates spread with agar, a jelly-like substance used as a nutrient in germs culture. In these secretions he discovered the substance that destroyed the microbes in the culture plates. He called it lysozyme. This was the first natural antiseptic that was harmless to the cells of the body; Penicillin was the second.

Another accident helped Fleming discover penicillin. If Fleming had not developed a finer sense of observation and awareness he would have missed it. The more a scientist is observant the greater his chances of discovering new things. One morning, as was usual with him, he took out the plates on which had grown colonies of Staphylococcus, a common germ.

Which technique makes it easier to understand the text?

Which technique is more helpful in developing reading ability?

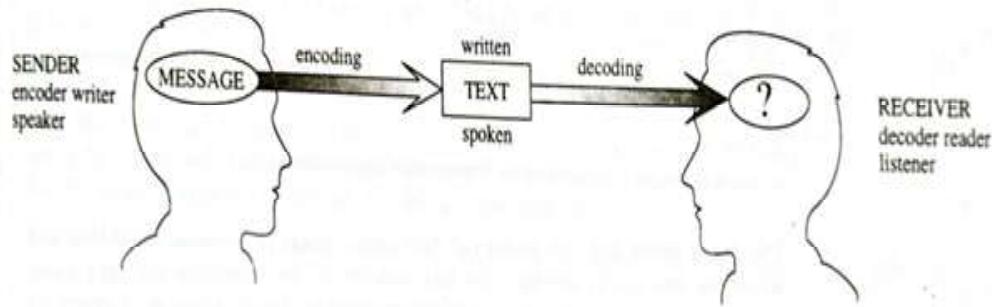
Another important aspect of reading is that when we read for meaning, we do not need to read every letter of every word, nor every word in each sentence. This is because we can guess much of what is said as we read it, provided the text makes sense. For example, if you are given merely a string of words that makes no sense at all like this: [man jumping tiger the on lake help to] then obviously you have to slow down and read every single word, as you can no longer make guesses. But try to read this sentence.

A m — was walk — d—n the s —t, c— r - ing a gr—n —.

Even though more than half the letters are missing, you could probably read the sentence without difficulty, and even guess the last word without the help of any letters. You may also have noticed that as soon as you guessed the second word, it helped you go guess the whole of the first part of the sentence. This example is only an isolated sentence. If you are reading connected sentences in a text, each sentence helps you to guess what the next one will be, and so on through the whole text.

Reading is thus an active process. When we read, we do not merely sit as passive receivers of the text. We also draw on our own knowledge of the world and of the language to help us guess what the text will say next.

Look at this very simple mode of the process of communication.

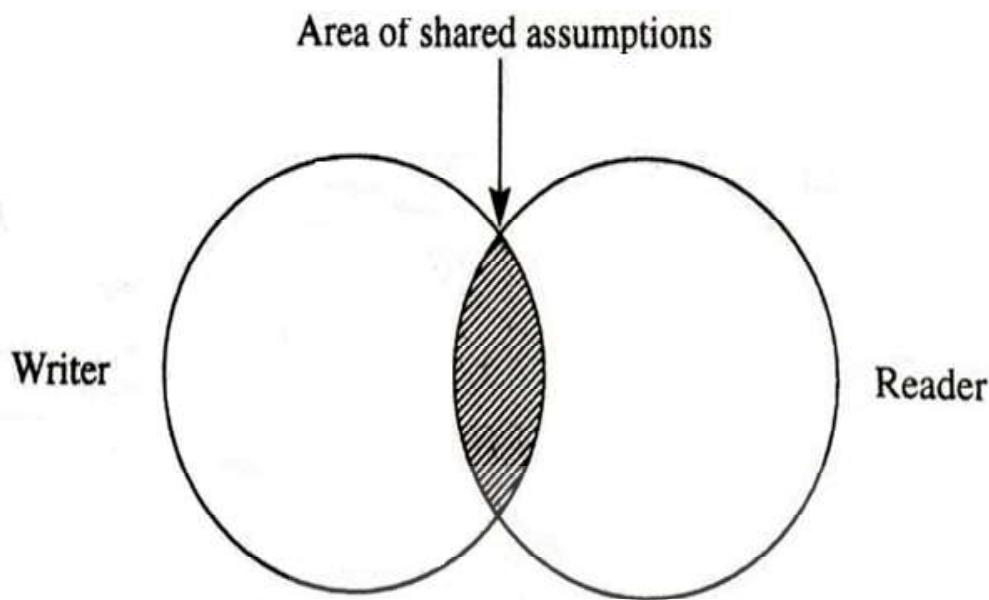


**Figure 1: The Communication Process**

We can use the more general term **encoder**. The encoder has a message in his/her mind (it may be an idea, a fact, a feeling, etc.) which s/he wants to communicate to someone else. In order to make this communication possible, s/he must first put it into words: that is s/he must encode it. Once it is encoded, in either written or spoken form, it becomes available as a text to any other person who reads or hears it, i.e., the person who decodes, the message it contains. Once it is decoded, the message enters the mind of the decoder and it is understood; communication has thus been achieved.

Do you think that this model explains the communication process satisfactorily? You will realize that the model is obviously too simple. Things can go wrong at any stage in the process. For instance, we cannot be sure that the decoder has received the message as it was intended by the encoder. The decoder may not have understood the language and style in which the message has been enclosed, or the encoder may not have encoded his/her message properly, in an organised manner. However, one thing is clear from this model, namely it assumes that reading means getting out of the text as nearly as possible the message that the writer put into it.

This is fairly widely held view of reading. According to this view, the text is full of meaning conveyed through words, and the meaning can be absorbed by the reader's mind like a sponge absorbs water. To put it in another way, the reader's mind is an empty vessel into which the text pours ideas, facts, etc. Or it is like a blank slate on which the text imprints the words, the ideas, etc. The writer has done all that is required for understanding his/her message and the reader need not make any effort, but has only to let his/her mind absorb it passively. The reader's role is thus seen to be a passive one. Obviously, we know that it does not happen like this. All the meaning in the text does not actually get into the reader's mind. We know from our experience of reading that a text which may be easy for one person will be difficult for another. Problems arise when there is a mismatch between the presuppositions of the writer and those of the reader. The text will, therefore, not be understood by anyone who lacks this knowledge. But is it possible for the writer and the reader to have identical experiences of life? Not necessarily. Look at the figure below,



**Figure 2: Presupposition and Communication**

The figure shows how two people can have certain things in common, the shaded area where the two circles overlap. This area includes all the knowledge that they share, including knowledge of language, it also includes attitudes, beliefs, values and assumptions that they share. The unshaded areas represent experiences that are unique to each individual.

It is clear, therefore, that the greater the size of the shaded area, the easier the communication. That is, if the writer and the reader are from closely similar backgrounds with similar attitudes, beliefs and assumptions, the reader can interpret the text with apparently no conscious effort. There is, however, the danger that a careless reader may assume that the extent of the shaded area — that common ground — is bigger than it actually is. In that case s/he is likely to misunderstand the text, trying to read into it meanings that are not there. Similarly, a writer may assume that his/her reader is likely to share a great deal of his/her knowledge, beliefs, etc. but the reader may actually struggle to make sense of the text.

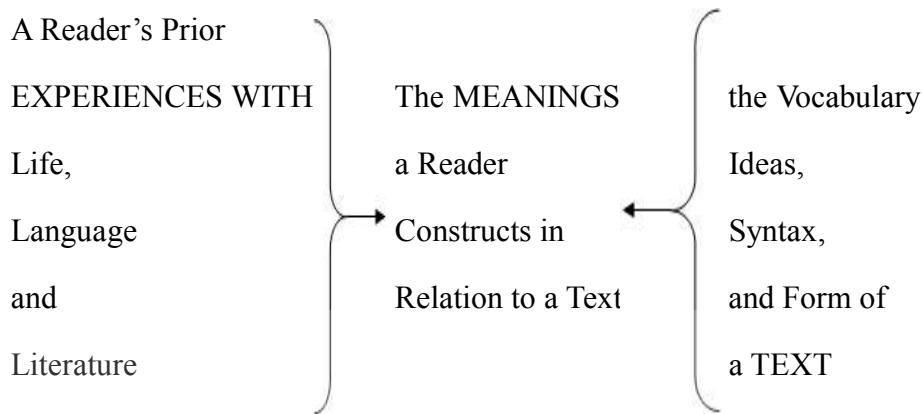
It should now be clear that the meaning of the text does not merely lie in it, waiting to be passively absorbed by the reader. On the contrary, the reader has to be actively involved in getting the meaning out of the text.

## **1.4 STRATEGIES USED BY GOOD READERS**

Good readers interact with the texts that they read. They have personal expectations about what they want to get out of a text, and they bring those expectations to bear on what they read. They actually create meaning by constructing, or generating relationships between what they read and what they already know.

In generating these meanings, they draw on their prior knowledge of and beliefs about the subject – their “World knowledge” so to speak, that relates to the subjects. Readers have networks of prior understanding about a topic, what

theorists call **schemata**. In reading, they add to those networks, filling in some of the gaps with what they know, or in their existing schemata: The prior knowledge a reader already has about a subject has as much to do with what s/he gets from a text as the actual words in the text.



**Figure 3: The Relationship Among Prior Experiences, a Text, and the Meaning a Reader Constructs – Schema Theory in Action.**

Figure 3 shows the relationships among prior knowledge, a text and the meanings a reader constructs in relation to the text. It summarizes what is known as **schema** theory. The figure also shows that, in creating meaning, good readers rely also on their prior knowledge of how language works, of how ideas are organised in writing and of how different forms are structured.

Thus schemata are knowledge structures which represent a generalized knowledge about objects or events, or even about a language system which are activated while processing a text. An important function of schemata is therefore to help readers to match what they know with what the written text tells them, i.e., to monitor their comprehension. If there is some deficiency at the level of analysing print i.e. decoding problems like poor word recognition, the higher-level knowledge of the topic (i.e. schemata) will compensate for the deficiency. Reading is thus an interactive process; there is a simultaneous interaction of the reader's prior knowledge and his/her sampling of the text; this is done constantly while reading.

Let us see this process at work with a simple example. Here is the beginning of a short text you are required to read:

*Keshav was on his way to school last Wednesday.*

Who, do you think Keshav was? How did you arrive at this conclusion? Was it based on textual information or on your prior knowledge? Now, the next sentence of the text reads like this:

*He was really worried about the English lesson.*

Who was Keshav? Have you now changed your view about Keshav, or not? Why? The third sentence:

*Last week he had been unable to control the class.*

Are you now sure who Keshav was? Which part of the text has to be matched with what kind of prior knowledge to help in the inference?

*It was unfair of the English teacher to leave him in charge of the class.*

What further changes in your inference have you made? Why?

The last sentence:

*After all, it was not a normal part of a computer operator's duty.*

Are you now clear in your mind about who Keshav was?

You will have realized from this short exercise what is actually involved in reading a text and making sense of it.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Distinguish between ‘silent reading’ and ‘reading aloud’

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- 2) Which of the two techniques of reading is to be preferred for understanding a text? Why?

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- 3) What is the role of ‘prediction’ in reading? Illustrate it with an example of your own.

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- 4) Explain the importance of shared assumptions between writer and reader.

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- 5) What are ‘schemata’ and what is their role in reading?

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- 6) What is the nature of the reading process - passive, active or interactive? Explain.

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## 1.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF READING

What do we mean by efficient reading? What are the characteristics of reading?

- 1) **Reading is purposeful.** That is, there is always a reason for reading. In general terms, we read either for information or pleasure. Your purpose in reading a textbook is obviously different from your purpose in going through a novel, or in reading a poem. But there is nothing like totally purposeless reading - even when you read a novel during travel, you read it to pass your time, and that is the purpose.
- 2) **Reading is selective.** That is, the type of reading you do or the way you read a text varies according to your purpose in reading. You quickly scan a page in the RWA telephone directory to locate a name, a telephone number, or an address, but you have to pay careful attention to every word in a legal document. To put it crudely, we scan for specific information, noting only what is relevant to our purpose at the given moment and rejecting or ignoring the majority of what appears on the page because it is irrelevant to our purpose. We skim, attempting to extract the gist of a text. Or we read intensively with the aim of decoding the whole of the writer’s message.
- 3) **Reading speed varies** according to content and purpose. Efficient readers use the minimum number of clues in the text - semantic and syntactic - to extract the information they need. You will agree that you generally read a novel or a short story faster than you read your textbook or study material, unless you are a literature student.
- 4) **Reading is silent.** Reading aloud is a specialized skill used, for example, by actors and newscasters, but seldom by the general reader. If it is used,

its purpose is to communicate to another person a written message to which that person does not have access.

- 5) **Reading is text-based.** It seldom involves the mere decoding of individual sentences isolated from context. Look at this set of sentences:

*The mind of a thinker may work in many ways. The experiments proved his theory of ring structure. However, water is only a solvent and not a reagent.*

What is wrong with this? We cannot make sense of these sentences, because they are together without any relationship among them. They do not constitute a text at all and so we cannot ‘read’ this set meaningfully.

- 6) Reading involves **complex cognitive skills**. Readers do not merely decode the message. They make predictions and inferences - they anticipate based on what they read. They build assumptions about the overall content at the macro-level and predict what is likely to come next in the text at the micro-level. That is why reading is called “a psycholinguistic guessing game”. Readers may also impose their own organization on the information they extract from a text. At a more sophisticated level, they react to what they read, assessing the accuracy of the facts presented, the value of the opinions stated, or the quality and appropriacy.
- 7) Effective reading also involves **chunking** of information that the well-developed schema makes possible. When we read, our eyes take in whole phrases at a time which are meaningful; they do not move from word to word in a straight line, but move backwards and forwards over the text. You will understand this if you do a simple exercise. Try covering a text with a piece of paper and read it literally word by word. Move the paper along the text, revealing only one word each time. You will find that it is almost impossible to read and understand a text in this way. You soon lose track of the meaning and you need to keep looking back across the text to take in whole sentences. Your reading slows down so much in this attempt to read only one word at a time; you lose the sense of what you are reading.
- 8) Reading is based on **comprehension**. That is, understanding meaning is integral to reading rather than the result of it. The more we comprehend, the more we can, and tend to read.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How would you say that reading is ‘purposeful’?

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- 2) How is one ‘selective’ in reading?

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- 3) What does the reading speed depend on? How?

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- 4) In what sense is reading called “a psycholinguistic guessing game”? Explain.

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## **1.6 LEVELS OF MEANING**

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Having begun to read, good readers operate cognitively at four highly interrelated and overlapping levels of meaning: the literal, the interpretive, the critical, and the creative. What is involved is understanding meanings at each of these four levels. Let us find out about these levels:

**Literal:** Literal comprehension involves the reader in understanding the information stated directly in a text. That information may be facts and details, sequences of events, main ideas and generalizations, causes and effects. The key element in comprehension at this level is that the information is present “in black and white” in the text. The reader does not have to dig too deeply to get at it. S/he should be able to state exactly what the passage is saying, to make sure that s/he understands it. For example, if the piece of writing is about someone digging the earth, the reader should be able to state what the person is actually doing- “digging the earth”.

Literal comprehension is of fundamental importance. It requires a thorough understanding of paragraph, sentence and word meanings and is required for higher levels of comprehension.

**Interpretive:** To read at the interpretive level, on the other hand, is to read ‘between the lines’, to recognise ideas and information not directly stated. In doing so, the reader must make inferences. S/he may have to infer time relationships - the year, time of day, and season; geographical relationships; cause and effect relationships; the ages, feelings and familial relationships of characters; main ideas and generalizations if these are not stated explicitly in the text. In other words, the reader must study the facts given in the text and put two and two together in making the inference.

Writers do not always state facts directly. They imply emotions and attitudes, and suggest points of view. For instance, an author may not state directly that a particular character is bad, but the words s/he uses to describe that person and the situation s/he presents him/her in may convey the author’s attitude towards that character. A perceptive reader should be able to recognise this attitude. S/he must be able to get beyond the surface meaning of words and see what the implications of such words are. For instance, the same persons could be called “terrorists” or “freedom fighters” according to the writer’s attitude towards them. Similarly, in describing someone eating, a writer may use the words, “wolfed down” “guzzled” or “slobbered”. If the writer is describing a baby eating, these words may be merely a statement of fact, but if they are about an adult, these may well be a suggestion of distaste towards the person who is eating.

Interpretive reading also involves ferreting out meanings expressed through literary allusions, idiomatic expressions, and figures of speech. The writer who writes of a character, “He had no heart”, does not mean this literally but is relying on an idiom to communicate meaning. Another author who describes a person as having a “Midas touch” is communicating something special, something meaningful, only to the reader who recognises the allusion to the king who wanted everything he touched to turn to gold. The poet who speaks of “crossing the bar” is referring metaphorically to death; he is not speaking literally of crossing a sand bar. The scientist who refers to the earth as a lifeboat to explain relationships aboard a planet troubled by the problems of limited resources and increasing population is also relying on a metaphor to put his/her message across.

One of the most difficult interpretations a reader must make is in terms of these kinds of inferences. The reader must bring to bear his/her previous experiences with language, literature, and life in constructing meanings.

**Critical:** Critical reading requires making judgements with regard to a text. The reader may judge the accuracy of facts, the validity of conclusions drawn, or the effectiveness of the author’s style. For instance, a writer may use very flowery language to create an atmosphere, or s/he may write ‘tongue in cheek’.

Critical reading also requires giving reasons for the judgement and stating the criteria used in making it, commenting on the views expressed in the passage and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the treatment of those ideas.

**Creative:** Creative reading calls for the generation of new ideas, insights, applications and approaches. It requires invention, prediction, and use of the

imagination. Proposing an alternative conclusion or generalization based on a reading text and suggesting related examples are exercises in creative reading. Composing orally, drawing, and writing stories with the same pattern or same words as in those that one has read are also exercises in creative reading.

**Check your progress 4**

- 1) What are the four levels of comprehension?

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- 2) Mention any two interpretive abilities with examples.

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- 3) What does ‘critical reading’ involve?

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- 4) Give two or three examples of ‘creative reading’.

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- 5) What does flexibility of reading depend on?

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## **1.7 READING PROBLEMS**

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**Misues or decoding errors**

Through one-to-one oral reading (or individual oral reading), a teacher can identify and interpret a child’s misues, or decoding errors. Misue analysis, or the analysis of a reader’s error patterns, provides valuable clues to a reader’s interaction with a text. If you study the error patterns systematically, you will

realize that all errors are not equally significant. Take, for example, the reading of the sentence: '*He sat on the sofa after supper*'. A child who reads it as '*He sat on the bed after supper*' has used context clues to decode sofa incorrectly. However, she/he had not distorted the meaning of the sentence in any serious way. In contrast, the child who reads the same sentence as, 'He sat on the soup after supper' has used knowledge of the beginning consonant sounds to come up with another word that distorts meaning significantly.

A teacher should therefore raise these questions in analysing a reader's miscues

- a) How well does the child use phonic information during reading? If the child says *rid*/for *ride* and *fum*/for *fume*, s/he knows the initial and final consonants and uses them appropriately, but s/he does not use the final construction to interpret the vowel correctly.
- b) How well does the child use syntactic information during reading? Supposing the text says: 'The boy looked sadly to the right' and the child reads it as, 'The boy looked slowly to the right', the miscue is syntactically acceptable because it is syntactically similar to the text (both the words are adverbs). But if the child reads it as 'The boy looked sound to the right', not only is the meaning of the sentence changed, but the miscue is syntactically unacceptable.
- c) How well does the child use semantic information during reading? If the text reads: 'The day was very warm' and the child reads it as 'The day was quite warm', the miscue has not significantly changed the meaning of the text. On the other hand, if the child reads it as 'The day wasn't very warm', the meaning of the text has been significantly changed.

So, analysis of a child's miscues provides the teacher with information on what to emphasize with that child: phoneme - grapheme relationships, use of context clues, or use of prediction based on what one knows about language. In this respect, miscue analysis is a valuable diagnostic tool.

### Faulty reading habits

Certain faults in reading techniques have been noticed among second or foreign language learners. Many of these might have actually been acquired in L1 reading, for research shows that there is a strong transfer of reading habits from one language to another. Many of these early reading habits, when they continue into the later stages of reading, are known to slow down the reader and the reading process.

- a) **Subvocalization:** Subvocalization refers to forming the sounds of the words you are reading and even murmuring them aloud. With beginning readers, this offers the support of the spoken language when they try to interpret the written form. Beginners in L1 reading (and in L2 as well) are often encouraged to make use of it. But reading aloud or subvocalization is much slower than silent reading - our eyes move faster than our tongue - so efficient readers do not subvocalize. If you subvocalize, you will tend to read word by word instead of in sense groups, which slows you down.
- b) **Finger pointing:** Another faulty habit that slows down the reading process is finger pointing which children use to fix their concentration on the word

they are deciphering. Finger pointing is particularly common when the writing system in the second or foreign language is not the same as the one in L1. This again slows down the reading process.

- c) **Regressions:** Another reading habit that makes reading slower is the occurrence of regressive eye movements, i.e. the eyes move backwards to check previous words instead of moving steadily forward. Sometimes, even a skilled reader may have to return to earlier parts of a text and reinterpret them in the light of what has followed. In this case, regression may be a sign of an active reader at work. However, we must eliminate pointless and frequent regression by practising reading with easy material.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) What is meant by ‘subvocalizing’?

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- 2) What is ‘regression’? Is it always a sign of faulty reading technique?

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## **1.8 LET US SUM UP**

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Reading is an important activity in our daily life and it is a skill that has to be developed in students earlier in school. We read different types of materials for different purposes. There are many authentic reasons for reading. Recognising words in print is only the initial stage of reading, but learners must be trained to read whole texts and not merely words and sentences in isolation.

Reading for meaning (or ‘silent reading’) is different from reading aloud. A general reader is seldom required to read aloud. When we read for meaning, we do not need to read every letter of every word, nor every word in each sentence, because very often we guess, anticipate, and predict as we read a text. A writer and his readers share certain assumptions about the world and about the language used for communication. Reading is an interactive process involving both bottom-up decoding of the text and top-down processing. The reader’s schemata interacts with the textual input.

Reading is purposeful, selective, and text-based. The reading speed varies according to one's purpose in reading and the content of the text. Reading involves complex cognitive skills. It is called "a psycholinguistic guessing game" because it involves making predictions. The teacher who teaches reading should recognize the learner's reading problems, including faulty reading habits, and should help them to overcome those problems.

## 1.9 ANSWERS

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Time-tables, maps, diary, calendar, labels, notices, instruction manuals, newspapers, magazines, books, sign boards, forms, and so on - the range is very wide.
- 2) Traditionally, reading is used in the classroom to consolidate the oral work done by students earlier, to make them see the relationships between speech sounds and written symbols, and to answer questions in assignments and examination. (you may have your own answer)
- 3) We normally read to get information about a topic, to perform a task with the help of instructions or directions, to establish friendly relationships through correspondence, to know about programmes, goods and services, etc., and get enjoyment or excitement.
- 4) Reading is an important activity in which students are likely to engage themselves in during their study or later in their jobs or even in personal life. So it has to be developed as a skill to enable to cope with these demands.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) 'Silent reading' is reading for meaning and it is a more common activity than 'reading aloud', which is done in limited contexts. Silent reading is easier and faster than the other.
- 2) 'Silent reading' is to be preferred because it enables one to read faster and comprehend the text more easily.
- 3) The ability to predict what will come next in a reading text is central to the process of reading. It helps the reader to monitor his/her comprehension of the text. It also helps the reader to process minimum textual input to arrive at the meaning of the text.
- 4) The more the shared assumptions, the better the communication. Without shared assumptions, comprehension of the writer's message will be extremely difficult, if not impossible.
- 5) Schemata are mental structures embodying one's prior knowledge of the world, his/ her experiences, and also his/her knowledge of the language in which the message is enclosed. They help the reader in anticipating and predicting what will follow in a text. Textual input is matched against schemata to make sense of the text.
- 6) Reading is an interactive process involving a simultaneous interaction of bottom-up decoding of a text with the reader's schemata to produce meaning.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Reading is purposeful because it is the purpose which dictates and directs the way we read a text and process it. It suggests what strategy or technique of reading we need to employ to satisfy our needs.
- 2) A reader is ‘selective’ in reading in two ways. First s/he selects the kinds of texts s/he would be interested in reading. Secondly, s/he selects the minimum clues in the text to arrive at its meaning for his/her purpose without having to read every word in it.
- 3) Reading speed depends on content and purpose. Reading light fiction is easier, and hence faster than reading a philosophical or scientific text full of jargon. Similarly, if the reader’s purpose is only to get the gist of a text, s/he needs to skim through the text fast. But if s/he wants to read for details, s/he has to read it with concentration and effort.
- 4) Reading involves basically making guesses and predictions about what might follow in a text, matching these against fresh textual input, and modifying them accordingly. It is in the sense that reading is called “a psycholinguistic guessing game” because the predictions are made possible by the schemata available in the reader’s mind.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) Literal, interpretive, critical and creative.
- 2) Interpreting or inferencing time relationships, geographical relationships, cause and effect, generalizations based on details/facts given, attitudes, emotions and points of view. Select any two and give your own examples.
- 3) Making judgements about the accuracy of facts, validity of opinions or inferences, effectiveness of style and organisation, etc.
- 4) Dramatising or role-playing, rewriting from a different point of view, etc.
- 5) The nature of the text to be read and the reader’s purpose in reading it.

**Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) Subvocalization refers to the act of forming the sounds of the words we are reading and even murmuring them aloud.
- 2) Regression refers to the tendency of the eyes to move backwards over print instead of moving forward. No, sometimes, even a skilled reader may do it to modify his/her earlier predictions in the light of fresh textual clues.

# **UNIT 2 VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Structure**

- 2.0 Objectives
  - 2.1 Introduction
  - 2.2 Active and Passive Vocabulary
  - 2.3 Content Words and Function Words
  - 2.4 Some Difficulties in Learning English Vocabulary
  - 2.5 Word Building: Affixation and Compounding
  - 2.6 Using a Dictionary and a Thesaurus
  - 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
  - 2.8 References and Suggested Readings
  - 2.9 Answers
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## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After you have read this lesson, you should be able to:

- differentiate between active and passive vocabulary;
  - distinguish content and function words;
  - discuss with appropriate examples homonyms, homophones, homographs or idiomatic expressions;
  - enumerate the use of suffixes and prefixes; and
  - justify the use of dictionary and thesaurus to expand vocabulary.
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## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Like bricks when laid out properly, correctly and with some imagination can build up simple walls or complex design for buildings and mansions, not to talk of other structures, similarly a language user uses different words to construct sentences – both single word sentences or longer ones. But just as bricks alone are not adequate, and they need to be strengthened by use of mortar/concrete mixture, similarly words alone may not be adequate. The appropriacy of the word chosen, the word order in which it is placed, the nuance of the meaning – everything play an important role. In this lesson, we will read how words – oral or written – are gradually learnt and how a learner, over the years, adds to the initial word base.

## **2.2 ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOCABULARY**

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Just think for a moment. Can you use all the words the moment you have heard them or have read them once? Do you use all the unfamiliar words – the meanings of which you have guessed while reading or listening – in your speech or writing? Some words you may, some you might not. But you start understanding those words if you hear or read them again and again. Our listening and reading

vocabulary is much more than our speaking or writing vocabulary.

The words that you can use appropriately when you say or write something form what is known as your **active** vocabulary and those that you have an idea of or can guess the meaning of, but cannot use confidently form a part of your **passive** vocabulary. Our *active* vocabulary is more limited (smaller) than our *passive* vocabulary. As students we try our best to increase the repertoire of both active and passive vocabulary and gradually try to convert our passive into our active vocabulary.

### Check your progress 1

- 1) Given below are a few words. Under which category ‘Active’ or ‘Passive’ would you put them?

antiseptic      anomaly      forte      herbarium      paroxysm

- i) Consult a dictionary to find out the meaning and pronunciation of the words (given above) if you do not know them.
- ii) Compare your list with someone in your family or one of your friends. Does the list differ?

- 2) Look at the following words:

Rapport      Abdicate

Recede      Maverick

Would memorizing the meaning and pronunciation of these words help you in using them immediately in your speech? Give at least one reason for your answer.

## **2.3 CONTENT WORDS AND FUNCTION WORDS**

Read the following sentences:

- 1) I saw a beautiful bird sitting on a branch of a gulmohar tree.
- 2) Pari, my five year old granddaughter, wants to wear blue jeans all the time. She cries loudly whenever her parents ask her to put on a frock, however beautiful.

Look at the **underlined** words carefully, once again. Even as isolated discrete words they carry some meaning. These words, if you observe carefully, are nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. These words are called **content** words. On the other hand, the words which are not underlined are **function** words. These words are more frequently used and carry some grammatical meaning. These words which are also known as *structure* words, are modal and auxiliary verbs, determiners, prepositions and conjunctions.

New learners learn content words first. The list of such words are **open**, in the sense that new words are added to this list over the years, e.g. think of the word *helipad* or *smart phone*. Did these words exist some hundred years ago? Why were these words added to the list of words that are so commonly used today? Think and write your answer here.

On the other hand, **function** words are a much smaller set, although more frequently used and the word list is a **closed** one, i.e. no *new* determiners or prepositions have been added to this list.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Which of the following words would you consider of recent origin?

phishing	hand blender	milk shake	cute
clone	iPod	flash mob	blue tooth
smart card	smiley		

- 2) Look for the meanings of the words given in question 1. Use a dictionary to decide the part of speech these words belong to.

- 3) Find out how long these words have been in circulation.

## 2.4 SOME DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY

Learners of English as Second Language may find a few stumbling blocks in mastering this language. In this section we shall look at a few of these difficulties.

### **One Word Many Meanings (Homonyms)**

Homonyms are words which have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings in different contexts. In the following sentences, the word **club** has different meanings.

As a child, you might have gone to a local **club** in your colony. You might have seen the picture of *Bhim* with a **club** in his hand in *Mahabharat* serial on television, and if you play cards, you have to deal with **clubs** in the pack. You might suggest to a student to **club** two paragraphs together to make the writing more compact.

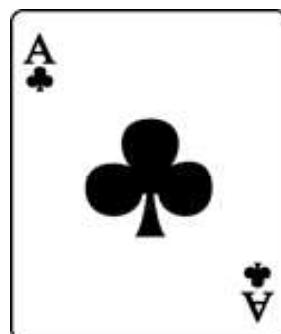
- A **club** is an association of people with common interest (first sentence).



- A **club** is a heavy stick with a thick end, used as a hand weapon (*Bhim* with a club in his hand).



- **Clubs** is one of the four suits in a conventional pack of playing cards.



- In the fourth sentence, **club** means **combine**.

Let us take another example.

- 1) She went to her room and lay down on the **bed**.
  - 2) My husband is busy preparing a **bed** for the pansies.
  - 3) Heat the curry thoroughly and serve it on a **bed** of rice.

You will notice that the word *bed* has different meanings in the examples given above. You understand the meaning from the **context** in which the word has been used. E.g. the context of the first sentence is a piece of furniture, in the second sentence the context is the area in a garden so that plants can be grown in it, whereas “a bed of rice” in a recipe would mean a layer of rice.

These contexts give the clues about the meaning of the word *bed* or *club*. Read the examples given above again and look at the words that give you the clues about the situation.

In English, there are many such words where the spelling (written form) and pronunciation (sound) are the same but they have different meanings in different contexts.

### **Check your progress 3**

- 1) There are many **fans** in the room.  
Is this sentence ambiguous in meaning? Give a reason for your answer.

The background of the slide features a faint watermark of the Open University's logo, which consists of a stylized 'OU' monogram. To the right of the monogram, the words 'THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY' are written in a large, serif font. The entire watermark is rendered in a light gray color that is semi-transparent, allowing the white background of the slide to show through.

- 2) What are the different meanings of the word *light*? Use the word in sentences to bring out the different meanings. Compare your answers with any dictionary.

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**Same Sound Different Form and meanings (Homophones)**

Look at the following set of words.

A	B
1) Great	grate
2) flour	flower
3) break	brake
4) there	their
5) stationary	stationery
6) bow	bough

What is common in the different set of words?

Yes. You have got it right. The pronunciation (sound) of both the words are exactly the same but the written form (spelling) are different. The meaning of the words are also different. Which spelling to use is decided by the context in which the word is used. Such pair of words – with identical sounds but different spelling and different meaning – are known as **homophones**.

homo = same

phone = sound

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) You must have noticed the warning on many cars / taxies in India - *Keep distance. Power Break*. What is wrong? Why?

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- 2) Give examples of five sets of homophones.

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**Same Form Different Sound and Meaning (Homographs)**

Now let us look at a different set of examples.

- 1a The Director's Secretary took down the **minutes**.
- 1b Even **minute** details are taken care of by a diligent organizer.
- 2a Warriors, in earlier days, fought with **bows** and arrows.

- 2b We **bow** our head to the martyrs of our freedom movement.

#### Vocabulary Development

What do you notice in the above examples? Write it in a sentence here.

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Did you notice that the spelling in both the sets of sentences are the same? What about the sound (pronunciation) and meaning? Consult a dictionary if you are not sure. Such pair of words are termed homographs.

homo = same

graph = writing

In the above examples, did the context of the word help you in deciding the *meaning*? If yes, then write down the pronunciation and meanings of the words *minute* in sentences 1a and 1b and *bow* in sentences 2a and 2b.

#### Check Your Progress 5

- 1) The words *lead* (v) and *lead* (n) are homographs as are the words *live* (v) and *live* (adj). Explain with suitable example.

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- 2) Give examples of another set of homograph (other than the ones mentioned here). Use them in your sentences to bring out the difference in meaning. Consult a dictionary to check the pronunciation.

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## Idiomatic Expressions

Does lend an ear to someone mean the same as to lend someone money? What does from hand to mouth mean? Who in your family is the apple of your eye? Or what is it to have a green thumb?

As an experienced user of the language you know the meaning of such ‘idiomatic expressions’ and you are well aware that these *frozen* expressions mean something which is totally different from the sum total of the individual words. The meaning cannot be derived from individual words and must be **learnt** as a complete unit of meaning. And this understanding is acquired slowly, gradually and with constant contact with the language.

### Check your progress 6

- 1) Explain the meaning of the underlined idioms.
    - a) I refuse to play second fiddle to my younger sister any more. I have had enough.
    - b) I am sorry I cannot listen to you now. I am pressed for time.
    - c) I'd better write the information in my notebook. I have a head like a sieve.
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- 2) Substitute the underlined words with the appropriate idiom given in the box. You may have to change the form of the idiom if required.

A skeleton in the cupboard      make short work of

Drop a line      get the message

- a) You needn't look at your watch again. I've understood what you want me to do and I'll go now.
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- b) It is commonly said that every family has a secret or embarrassing fact which no one likes to discuss.
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- c) Don't forget to write to us as soon as you arrive in Delhi.
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- 3) Think of four idiomatic expressions in your **mother tongue** that uses different body parts e.g. *to have a finger in every pie*. Find out if there are English equivalent to those expressions in your mother tongue. Two examples in Hindi are given below:

oongli pe nachaana  
sar aankon pe bithaana

### **Formal-Informal Expressions / Approved – Disapproved**

Levels of formality and the connotations of some words also pose practical problems for students of a second language. In learning a new language there is a tendency to use the more formal language in normal conversational situations or vice versa i.e. use a slang or colloquial expression inappropriately. Similarly the positive or negative connotations of some words might create difficulty for you. We all know how we applaud the **firmness, determination** or **resoluteness** (words indicating approval) of people we like whereas we deplore the **stubbornness, obstinacy** and **pigheadedness** (terms indicating disapproval) of those whom we don't like in exactly the same situations. Similarly the same person can be **fat** or **plump** to different persons. It takes a long time for most of us to catch such nuances of the language.

### **Check your progress 7**

- 1) Write **formal (f), informal (inf), approved** or **disapproved** against the words given below. Consult a dictionary, if necessary.

Laudatory.....	smart alec.....
Sissy.....	felicitous.....
Dirt cheap.....	dude.....
Soporific .....	clobber.....

### **Hyponyms (word categories)**

Orange is a fruit and so is an apple, banana or a mango. The word *fruit* is a *superordinate* while the name of other fruits given above are the hyponyms. Similarly, learners are familiar with different items in the world around them. Given below are some examples of this category of sense relationship.

<b>Superordinate</b>	<b>Hyponyms</b>
Clothes	Shirt, trousers, frock, kurta...
Trees	Neem, banyan, gulmohar, acacia...
Different methods of cooking	Boil, simmer, bake, roast, deep fry, stir fry, sauté...
Colours	Blue, red, white, crimson, aquamarine, seagreen, ochre...

### **Collocation (word partnerships)**

When two terms are used together frequently, they are said to collocate, e.g. we can use the word colour in the following combination:

Adjective	bright colour, favourite colour
Noun	Colour blind, eye/hair colour, Colour film/ photograph, Colour television
Preposition	In colour

Source: Collins Cobuild Advanced Illustrated Dictionary

### Check Your Progress 8

- 1) Read the words given below in the rectangle. Put them in proper categories. One is done for you as an example. In some you have to write the categories in the boxes.

<i>Human dwellings</i> 1 wigwam	Apartment Iceland Norway Dinosaurs Denmark Platypus Bungalow	Canada Mammoth Villa Chaise lounge Chair Igloo	Mansion Sofa Wigwam Duckbilled Tent	
				Countries

- 2) We often use certain words in combination with others. An example is given for you. Use a dictionary, if necessary.

Make	Money, comment, .....
Close	.....
Hair (colour)	.....
Hair (style)	.....

### Antonyms (Opposites)

The term *antonym* is used to refer to words which have an opposite meaning. But there are pairs of words which contrast in terms of a scale, e.g. hot/cold; tall/short; easy/difficult. These opposites are **gradable**. For example, if we put hot/cold (water) at two ends of a continuum, we get something like this.

Scalding hot → boiling hot → warm → lukewarm → tepid → quite cold → freezing cold

But think of opposites, male/female. Such meanings are **non gradable** or **mutually exclusive**. A boy cannot be a girl or a dead person cannot be alive/living.

### Synonyms (Similar Meaning)

Every language has groups of lexical items which are very similar in meaning (Synonym) but are never identical. For example: **angry**, **annoyed**, **upset** and

**irritated** may be synonyms but each word differ slightly from the others. As a teacher, you have to pay attention to synonyms if you wish to encourage your students to choose appropriate words in different types of writing.

### Check Your Progress 9

- 1) Make a word continuum for the pair big/small.

Huge → very big → ..... → very small → tiny

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- 2) Can words like **limp**, **hobble**, **stroll**, **saunter**, **march**, **stride**, **trudge** and **trek** be used as synonyms of walk? Consult a dictionary and give reasons for your answer.

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- 3) How many synonyms are there for the word glamour? Write them here.

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## 2.5 WORD BUILDING: AFFIXATION AND COMPOUNDING

### Affixation

We can build new words in English by adding *prefixes* and *suffixes* to the base word. For example, to the word *mortal* we can use the prefix *im* to make a new word *immortal* and we can get the word *immortalise* by adding the suffix- *ise*. Similarly, the word *agree* can take the prefix *dis-* to make a new word *disagree* and another word *disagreement* with the suffix – *ment*.

Use of prefixes like *im-*, *dis-* or *multi-* when added to the root word gives it a different meaning. For example:

un	-	uncommon, unable
in	-	inconvenient, injustice
dis	-	disadvantage, disagree
il	-	illegal, illegible
ir	-	irregular, irrelevant
im	-	impossible, impatient
multi	-	multilingual, multifaceted
fore	-	forenoon, forewarn

Here are some suffixes:

-age	bag-baggage, post-postage
-dom	kind-kingdom, star-stardom
-hood	state-statehood, boy-boyhood
-ism	hero-heroism, Hindu-Hinduism

### Compounding

Compounds are made up of two or more parts which can also occur independently as words. These separate words are combined to form other new words which are listed separately in the dictionary and have separate meanings.

Blackboard

Flowerpot

Armchair

THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY

### Check Your Progress 10

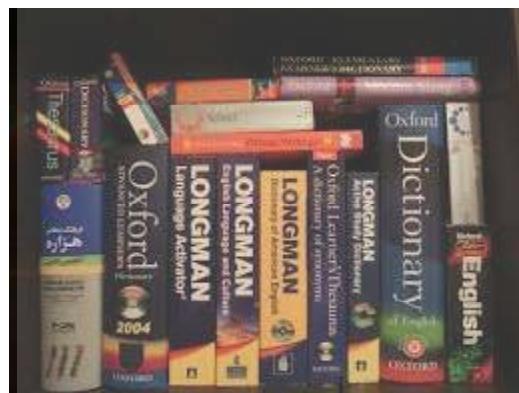
- 1) Choose the correct prefix from the prefixes given in brackets to express the kind of meaning indicated for each of the words given below:
  - i) Contented (mal-, dis-, un-) negative .....
  - ii) Represent (non-, mal-, mis-) ‘wrongly’ .....
  - iii) Inform (mal-, mis-, dis-) ‘incorrectly’ .....
  - iv) Active (ultra-, in-, hyper-) ‘extremely’ .....
  - v) Comfortable (un-, dis-, non-) negative .....
- 2) Match the words in Column A with those in Column B to form compounds

A	B
brain	pour
down	felt
draw	case

heart	back
stair	storm
	pin

## 2.6 USING A DICTIONARY AND A THESAURUS

Dictionaries are of help in checking and learning of pronunciation with the correct stress pattern, meaning in contexts (with examples) or grammar of a word (e.g. the part of speech it belongs to; whether transitive or intransitive in case of a verb or whether countable or uncountable in case of a noun). Some dictionaries like the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2002 edition) (OALD) gives the origin of the word.



For example, Gordian Knot which means a very difficult or impossible task or problem. Then in origin of the word it mentioned:

**ORIGIN:** From the legend in which King Gordius tied a very complicated knot and said that who ever untied it would become the ruler of Asia. Alexander the Great cut through the knot with his sword.

Moreover, dictionaries like the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995 edition), includes a picture dictionary (e.g. on kitchen, bicycles etc) as does Advanced Oxford or Collins Cobuild.

The last dictionary mentioned here also includes word Webs or topic related vocabulary through encyclopedia – like readings combined with related art work, word partnerships (collocations) and word links (word origin) e.g. (geo=earth; geography; geology, geopolitical) or even usage like less and fewer. You also have used the dictionary to decide whether a particular word is formal, informal, and shows approval and disapproval to complete your task set in Check your progress 7. While the language of literary criticism of OALD is very informative; the Text Messaging and Emoticons included in Collins Cobuild is very handy in an age of e-mails and SMSs. In other words, a dictionary is not only a useful reference material but also a treasure house of information to build up the vocabulary of your learners.

In higher classes, you will find both the thesaurus and the dictionary extremely beneficial in reading and writing tasks.

**Check Your Progress 11**

- 1) Substitute the word **nice** in the following paragraph. Change sentence construction, if necessary.

It was a **nice** morning. We went out for a **nice** picnic to a **nice** park near our house. The food was **nice** and we played **nice** games. We enjoyed the **nice** outing.

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- 2a) Make a cross word puzzle of *ten* new words that your students have recently learnt.
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- 2b) Ask your students to write clues (across and down) (using a dictionary, if necessary).
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## **2.7 LET US SUM UP**

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Isolated words are difficult to remember. When we learn words and phrases, our memory tries to group words that go together so that one word or phrase reminds us another. We have discussed some of these in different sections of this lesson e.g.

- Related to the same topic (*Associated words* e.g. the picture on kitchen)
- Examples of a more general word (*superordinate – Hyponyms*, e.g. Furniture – table, chair etc.)
- Similar in meaning (*synonyms* e.g. lazy – indolent)

- Opposite in meaning (*mix-separate*)
- Arranged along a scale, *word continuum* e.g.  
letter – word – phrase – sentence – paragraph – page – chapter – book
- Built from the same basic word (*Affixation, Compound words* e.g. Type – retype (prefix), child – children (suffix), type + write (compound words))

However, you must have observed that all the techniques discussed in the lesson are applicable to teaching of **content** words.

Secondly, a word is rarely learnt at one go. Hence, the need to **review, revise** and **recycle** words at frequent intervals so that the learning is spiral and a new aspect is added gradually over the years. Last but not the least, is the use of the mother tongue in providing a quick word meaning in a classroom. While it is easier to give / supply a mother tongue equivalent and classroom saves time, the technique should be sparingly used and must never be a practice. A classroom is the only place to listen to and use the second language, and hence optimal use of available time is absolutely necessary.

Moreover, vocabulary teaching **does not end** in school. It continues well into our adult life. It is a life-long process. Also our **passive** vocabulary is much larger than our **active** vocabulary.

Different techniques – separately and in combination – may be effectively used for teaching, expanding and consolidating student vocabulary. Dictionary and Thesaurus are very important reference material and students should be taught and encouraged to use the same. Vocabulary games make learning /revising of known words enjoyable.

## **2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS**

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## **2.9 ANSWERS**

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Open ended and answers will vary.
- 2) We do not learn those words which we don't use. Also to use a word one must know the meaning, the pronunciation, the context in which the word can be used, the other words that need to be used with that particular word and also the grammar of the word.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Phishing, iPod, Blue tooth, Smart Card, Smiley
- 2) a) Phishing (noun) – The practice of trying to trick people into giving secret financial information. (computing)  
b) Handblender, Milkshake, Clone (n/v),  
c) iPod, flashmob, bluetooth, smart card, smiley (noun)  
d) cute (adjective)
- 3) Do it yourself.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) The Context is not clear. Which fan are we talking about? – The ceiling, table or pedestal fans in a room **or** the ardent admirers (as in the fans of Aamir Khan)
- 2) There was no light in the room.

I prefer light colour paint on walls.

I am very light sleeper.

Let us have some light refreshment.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) The correct word should have been **brake**. The person who has got it written does not know the difference of meaning between *break* and *brake*.
- 2) Blue – blew; see – sea; sale – sail; son – sun; piece - peace.

### **Check your progress 5**

- 1) a) Good leaders **lead** (v) from the front.  
Use a **lead** (n) pencil to draw and sketch.  
b) We **live** (v) in the capital city of India.  
Be careful of **live** (adjective) wires. / A **live** (adjective) telecast of the final tennis match.
- 2) Do it yourself.

### **Check your progress 6**

- 1) a) If you **play second fiddle** to someone, your position is less important although you work together; if you **have had enough**, you are unhappy with a situation and want it to stop.  
b) have no time.  
c) If you **have a head like a sieve** you do tend to forget important things.
- 2) a) got the message.

b) a skeleton in the cupboard.

c) drop a line.

3) Do it yourself

### Check Your Progress 7

Laudatory – formal

Smart alec – informal, disapproval

Dirt cheap – informal

Dude - informal

Sissy - informal, disapproval

Felicitous - formal

Soporific - formal

Clobber - informal

### Check Your Progress 8

1)

	<b>Super ordinate</b>	<b>Hyponyms</b>
1)	Dwellings (human)	Villa, wigwam, apartment, mansion, bungalow, igloo, tent
2)	Countries	Canada, Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Denmark
3)	Furniture	Sofa, coffee table, chaise longue, chair
4)	Animals (Extinct)	Mammoth, dinosaurs, duckbilled platypus

2)

Make: mess; comment; money; suggestion

Close: contest/election; contact; friend; family; connection; attention

Hair (colour): golden; red; black; white; grey; auburn; salt and pepper; blonde

Hair (style): long; short; frizzy; permed; straight; shoulder/waist/knee length; curly

### Check Your Progress 9

1) Huge – very big – big – quite big – medium sized – quite small – small – tiny

2) Do it yourself.

3) Do it yourself.

### Check Your Progress 10

1) i) Contented (mal-, dis-, un-) negative **discontented**

ii) Represent (non-, mal-, mis-) ‘wrongly’ **misrepresent**

- |                                   |  |                      |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| <b>Reading and Writing Skills</b> | iii) Inform (mal-, mis-, dis-) ‘incorrectly’ | <b>misinform</b>     |
|                                   | iv) Active (ultra-, in-, hyper-) ‘extremely’ | <b>hyperactive</b>   |
|                                   | v) Comfortable (un-, dis-, non-) negative    | <b>uncomfortable</b> |
- 2) Brainstorm
- Downpour
- Drawback
- Heartfelt
- Staircase

### **Check Your Progress 11**

Do it yourself.



# **UNIT 3 THE WRITING SKILL: SOME BASIC GUIDELINES**

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## **Structure**

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Methods of Writing
  - 3.2.1 Identifying your Subject
  - 3.2.2 Gathering Information
  - 3.2.3 Purpose
  - 3.2.4 Knowing your Reader
- 3.3 Beginning to Write
  - 3.3.1 Writing the Thesis Statement
  - 3.3.2 Writing a Paragraph
  - 3.3.3 Introductions and Conclusions
- 3.4 Organising your Writing
  - 3.4.1 Forms of Discourse
- 3.5 The Writing Process
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 References and Further Readings



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## **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we are going to discuss in detail the writing process. We will discuss the methods of writing which involve identifying the topic, gathering information on it and the purpose of writing. When we begin writing, it is important to start with a thesis statement, followed by an essay map, adequate paragraphing and effective introductions and conclusions. We also must be aware of the various discourse types involved in organising your writing: expository, descriptive, narrative or argumentative. Finally, we get into the process of writing the drafts, reviewing, editing and proof reading.

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## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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If you are a student, one of the important tasks that you will have to perform is writing. You may have to write assignments, term papers, emails, formal letters and so on. To fulfill these activities competently you need to be good at written communication.

Writing is a complex process and competent writing is a difficult skill to be acquired. There are many myths about the skill of writing. For example, people assume that good writers are born with an innate ability to write and are able to dash off a letter or a report without much effort. Research has, however, shown that this is not true. All writers need to work at their writing, although some may be more successful at it than others. Moreover, keeping closely to word limits and formats is even more difficult while writing in formal contexts.

Therefore, it is clear that writing is not a gift but is a skill that anyone can pick up, by focusing not only on what you have to say and how to say it, but also by concentrating on those strategies that are most likely to help you write successfully. Now let's see what a few experienced writers have to say about what leads to good writing:

- Experienced writers spend a lot of their time planning before they attempt the first draft.
- They spend a considerable amount of their time thinking about their readers.
- They explore their subject/topic as thoroughly as possible.
- They consider their first draft to be a rough one.
- They thoroughly revise their draft. Sometimes, completely rethinking and restructuring their first draft.

Of course, not all writers follow the same method and a particular writer may use different methods at different times. But the methods suggested here have been generally tried and tested by people who write competently. The steps you can follow are:

- planning
- considering your reader
- thoroughly investigating your subject/topic, yet recognising that new ideas will emerge as you write.
- organising.
- writing a full draft.
- revising and refining it which may often involve complete restructuring and reorganising.

It is not necessary to go through these stages in the sequence in which they are listed. When you write, many things happen at the same time. As you plan, you may find that you are thinking of facts and ideas that you may want to include in your draft. As you organise, you may find that you are once again exploring your topic. The steps that we have suggested are guidelines, not rigid rules. Please feel free to adapt them to suit your situation.

### **Check your progress 1**

Now let's reflect on what you do when you write. (Try to answer the questions give below)

- 1) How many drafts do you write? Or is your first draft your final draft?

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- 2) How do you start writing? Do you wait till you find a suitable beginning and then proceed linearly or do you jump somewhere to the middle when a suitable idea strikes you?

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- 3) Do you keep referring back to what you have written and sometimes restructure and re-write it again?

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- 4) What do you do when you manage to complete the first draft?

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### 3.2 METHODS OF WRITING

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Writing is commonly seen as a three way process: **pre-writing**, **writing** and **re-writing**. It may appear that writing may seem to progress in a linear, step-by-step fashion. But, in fact, it almost always progresses in a recursive manner. This simply means that writers return over and over again to their ideas, clarifying them, extending them or improving them. Most writers will plan and then revise their plans, write and rewrite parts or whole of their drafts until literally the last moment, when they need to submit or send to the reader concerned.

When we write it is a good idea to think about three key elements:

- 1) Purpose
- 2) Subject matter

## 3) Reader/ audience

You need to ask yourself:

- Why am I writing this piece?
- Whom am I writing for?
- Where do I source the material for it?

### **3.2.1 Identifying Your Subject**

Many of the topics you write about as a student will probably be assigned to you by your teachers. Of course, some of you may want to write papers for a seminar.

It is important to know why you are writing about a particular subject and who you are writing it for. Does the situation demand it or is it something that your teacher has asked you to write or is it something you have a deep desire to write on?

You also need to know who your readers are and whether they are likely to be familiar about the contents of what you are writing – or is the subject totally new for them. Your explanation will be much less if the readers are familiar with the topic. However, if you are writing an assignment or a term paper, even though your teacher may be familiar with the contents, you must write all that is appropriate on the topic.

Knowing why you are writing will help you formulate a goal, do research and organise your material. You need to identify and state your purpose clearly because only then:

- will your reader understand what you are writing about;
- can you gather the information that is most relevant to your readers and your goal; otherwise you are likely to collect any and all information that is available.

### **3.2.2 Gathering Information**

As a student you may have to make a presentation. You must make sure that before you write it, you have all your matter in one place. While researching, read quickly through your material and use **highlighters** to indicate the material that you think you can use in your writing. You could use one colour highlighter for ideas, another for evidence and another for arguments. (Hamp-lyons and Heasley, 2006)

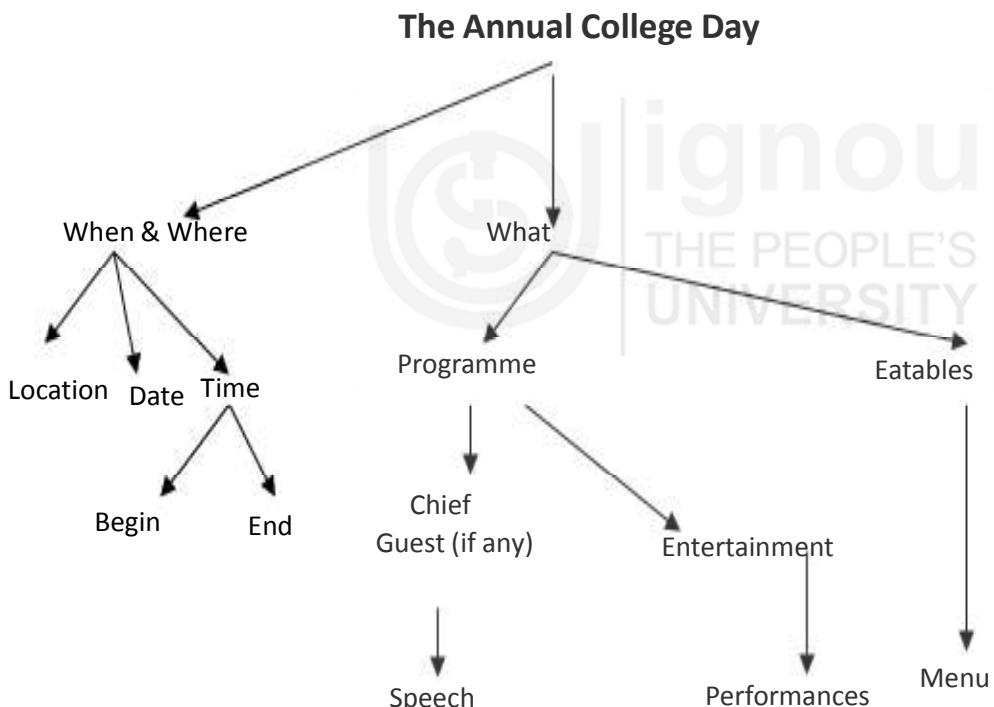
You could also **make notes** as you go along. Keeping notes will enable you to be specific and keep track of and manipulate what you have read. It is a good idea to concentrate on purely gathering information; wait until later to decide whether the information is valuable and important.

**Brainstorming** is also another well-known and productive method of generating ideas, facts and opinions very quickly. Again, not all the ideas will be of equal quality or usefulness, but you can evaluate that later. Of course, brainstorming need not always be with others; it can also be an activity which you perform by yourself.

Working by yourself is a little different from brainstorming in a group. You will need to motivate yourself to generate the same energy that usually accompanies a group activity. You can do this best by reviewing your materials and notes before you begin brainstorming. In fact, this session can be termed as a **planning session** so it is important to keep track of ideas and information that you generate by making a list. You may even speak into a recorder. There is no need to write and speak in complete and connected sentences. Your goal is to generate as many ideas as you can through rapid thinking and free association. And you can evaluate the ideas at a later stage.

Another technique that you can use to help you recall ideas, information and arguments is to build an **issue tree** or a **mind map**. Brainstorming and note taking is a verbal technique that requires you to record your ideas in words. Issue trees and mind maps, however, are primarily visual. That is, as you think of ideas and information, you construct the visual display that arranges your information in a hierarchical structure. In this way, you can see each idea's relative importance and its relationship to other ideas.

### The Issue Tree



### 3.2.3 Purpose

You must be very clear about what your text is going to be used for, for example, are you expected to write a report, a memo or a letter advertising a training session or a new book.

Having a clearly stated purpose is like having a destination when you take a trip. Once you have decided on a destination, you can make the arrangements on how to reach it. An explicit purpose statement will help you to:

- identify the steps that you must take to reach your goal;

- concentrate your search for information/ideas on what is related to your purpose.

### **3.2.4 Knowing your Reader**

Once you know your subject/topic and the type of communication you want to make, the next most important question to ask yourself is who the reader is. The answer to this question will effect how and what you write. For example, if you are writing an assignment or term paper you could perhaps use some technical jargon and pitch your language and subject matter to a higher level. If you are writing for the notice board, the language would be quite different.

You also need to think about what the reader already knows and what s/he needs to know. You do not want to tell the writer what s/he already knows although you may refer to shared information from time to time. If you are giving information that is completely new, this information must be stated and explained with great clarity. It is a good idea to know the attitude of the readers as well. Are they likely to be provoked by the topic? If so, it is better to use more tactful language. In brief, you could ask yourself these questions about the reader:

- Is the reader an expert or a general reader?
- What does the reader already know about the topic?
- What background information might they need to know to understand the current situation?
- What does s/he need to know?
- What action do you want them to take?
- What is their attitude? Are they biased or do they have positive associations with your subject?

#### **Check your progress 2**

- 1) Make an issue tree or a mind map on the basis of the Issue Tree given in the Unit on any one of following topics:
  - i) The new face of Library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - ii) Is the reading habit dying out?
  - iii) Life without the Internet.
  - iv) Multimedia in the classroom.

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### **3.3 BEGINNING TO WRITE**

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It is important to begin writing with more information than you think you will need. The greater your choice, the more likely it is that you will be able to select the ideas, facts and arguments that will help you accomplish your purpose. If you begin with only five or seven facts or examples to support your main idea, you are likely to use all of them regardless of their quality. But if you gather, say, ten to fifteen facts or examples, you have a choice that will effectively help you accomplish your job. As a result, there will be fewer gaps in your presentation and your reader is less likely to raise questions and objections. However, at the same time do not take your research so seriously that you invest too much time and effort in it. Remember, you have deadlines to answer for.

### 3.3.1 Writing the Thesis Statement

Let us assume that at this point you have identified the topic you wish to write about. You may now find it useful to formulate a **thesis statement**. What is a thesis statement? And how does it help to have a thesis statement? *A thesis statement declares the main point or controlling idea of your writing task.* It is frequently located at the beginning of your writing. Your thesis statement may begin as a very simple sentence.

Example:

*The University requires smart boards urgently if education has to be delivered in a modern way.*

Such a “working” thesis states an opinion about the subject (the need for smart boards) and suggests what the report /memos shall do (give arguments for building such a classroom).

Allow such a statement to work for you as you move from pre-writing stage through your various drafts and revisions. A “*working thesis statement*” can be your most valuable organisational tool. Once you have thought about your main point and purpose, you can begin to draft your article to accomplish your goal. Everything in your writing should support your thesis statement.

A working thesis statement in your early draft is to help you focus and organise your writing; don’t feel that it is carved in stone and cannot be changed. Let us remember some guidelines for writing a good thesis statement.

- A good thesis statement states the writer’s clearly defined opinion on a particular topic;
- It generally asserts one main idea;
- It is stated in specific terms.

### Essay Map

Many thesis statements will benefit from the addition of an essay map *which is a brief statement in the introductory paragraph introducing the main points to be discussed in the essay.* In addition to suggesting the main points of writing, the essay map provides two other benefits: it will provide a set of guidelines for organising your writing and it will help you from wandering off into areas only vaguely related to your thesis statement. In other words, your thesis statement and essay map are a skeleton outline for the sequence of paragraphs in your writing.

Note that this essay map is different from the mind map, the crucial difference being that the essay map describes in a more concrete fashion the main point of each paragraph. A mind map, on the other hand, is a jotting down of ideas as they came to your mind.

### 3.3.2 Writing a Paragraph

Mastering the art of writing a paragraph is essential to success in any form of writing, whether it is a letter, a report, or a newspaper article, since all longer

pieces contain a series of related paragraphs. In these longer pieces of writing, paragraphs generally introduce new ideas to develop the central theme.

**What is a Paragraph?** A paragraph is a piece of writing which is unified by a **central, controlling** idea or theme. This idea or theme is called the **topic** of the paragraph. It is sometimes expressed at some place in the paragraph by one sentence, which is usually called the **topic sentence**. This topic sentence may be a statement, a generalisation, or a problem. This sentence is most frequently found at the **beginning** of the paragraph, but can sometimes come at the **end** or even in the **middle** of the paragraph. Very often there may not be a topic sentence at all, but it may be implied within the paragraph.

Beginning a paragraph with a topic sentence helps both the writer and the reader. As a writer, you will have less difficulty in constructing a unified paragraph because you will relate every sentence to the topic sentence and the central idea it expresses. And your reader will know immediately what the paragraph is about, because the opening sentence states the central idea.

In order to develop the central theme of a paragraph, you have to expand the idea contained in the topic sentence. This can be done by adding more information, explanation, examples, illustrations, etc. to the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

Example:

*Two main circumstances govern the relationship of living things in the sea: the unbelievably lavish fruitfulness of marine life forms, and the utter ruthlessness with which the larger creatures eat the smaller ones. Somebody has calculated, for instance, that if all the eggs laid by codfish were hatched and grew to maturity, the Atlantic would be packed solid with codfish within six years. But nature does not let this happen. Only an infinitesimal fraction of all codfish eggs ever become full-sized cod, and wastage among other fish is as great. One sea creature in about 10 million escapes the usual violent death inside another sea creature.*

Analysis of the paragraph:

- 1) **Topic statement:** ‘Two main circumstances govern the relationship of living things in the sea.’
- 2) **Elaboration of the topic sentence:** the fruitlessness of marine life and the ruthlessness with which the larger creatures eat the smaller ones.
- 3) **Illustration:** The example of the codfish.
- 4) **Summing up:** only one sea creature in about ten million survives.

An effective paragraph requires more than a **topic sentence** and supporting details; it must also be coherent. In a coherent paragraph the writer takes the reader logically and smoothly from one idea to the next. The reader must also clearly recognise that one sentence logically leads to the next.

Another technique which brings about coherence in a paragraph is the use of **linkers** between sentences and within sentences. These are words/phrases that help a writer move smoothly from one sentence to the next and show the logical

relationship between sentences. We shall give you an example of what these linkers are and how they can be used.

Example:

*Man has been able to spread across the earth so widely for four main reasons. First, he is a terrestrial animal, not restricted to the forest. Secondly, he can cross any natural barriers, such as deserts, oceans and mountains. Moreover, he can live off a very wide variety of food. Most important of all, he has developed culture; he has learned to make clothes and build fires which allow him to live in climates where he would otherwise perish. To a large extent, he shares some of these advantages with the monkeys. They, too, can move over unforested land. They, too, can cross some natural barriers, as they have the ability to swim. And they, too, can digest many kinds of food. Thus, a single species of baboon has spread across Africa from Dakar in the west to Ethiopia in the east, and south all the way to the Cape of Good Hope. Similarly, macaques have done at least as well. One species, the rhesus macaque, is equally at home in forest, in open cultivated fields, and inside heavily populated cities.*

[From Eimerl, S. and De Vors, I. (eds.),  
'The Monkey's Success in the Trees', in the Primates, Time-Life Books.]

These linkers are like signposts in a paragraph. They enable us to follow the writer's line of thought by showing us how one sentence relates to another. In the above example, the words/word phrases *First, Secondly, Moreover, Most important of all* indicate the four main reasons why man has been able to spread so widely across the earth. *Most important of all* also shows that some reasons are more important than others. *Too* indicate that monkeys also share these characteristics of human beings. *Similarly* shows the relationship between the macaques and the baboons.

The following list includes other words and phrases that function as linkers:

- To express result: *therefore, as a result, consequently, thus, hence*
- to give examples: *for example, for instance, specifically, as an illustration*
- To express comparison: *similarly, likewise*
- To express contrast: *but, yet, still, however, nevertheless, on the other hand*
- To express addition: *moreover, furthermore, also, too, besides, in addition, and*
- To indicate time: *now, later, meanwhile, since then, after that, before that time*
- To express sequence: *first, second, third, then, next, finally*

The order in which you present your paragraphs is another decision that you have to make. In some pieces of writing, the subject matter itself will decide its own order. Other pieces of writing may not suggest such a natural order, in which case you have to decide which order will most effectively hold the attention of your readers. Often, writers withhold their strongest point until they reach the end of their writing. As you already know, each paragraph usually signals a major point in your discussion. These paragraphs should not appear as isolated blocks of thought but rather as part of a unified, step-by-step progression. To

bring about continuity, you must link each paragraph to the one before it with linkers. Sometimes, instead of using linkers or repetition of key words, you can use what is known as *idea hook*. The last idea of the earlier paragraph will lead you smoothly into your next paragraph.

### 3.3.3 Introductions and Conclusions

The first few sentences of your writing are particularly important because they help to catch the readers' attention and make them want to keep on reading. Here are some suggestions for successful introductions. You could begin with:

- Statement of a problem or a popular misconception;
- An arresting statistics or shocking statement;
- A question;
- A quotation;
- A relevant story, joke or anecdote;
- An analogy or comparison;
- A contrast;
- A personal experience;

A good piece of writing must have a satisfactory conclusion, one that gives a reader a sense of completion on the subject. It is important that the concluding paragraph emphasises the validity and importance of your thinking. Here are some suggestions that might lead to some ideas for your conclusions:

- A restatement of the thesis statement;
- An evaluation of the importance of the subject;
- Statement of the broader implications of your piece of writing
- A call to action;
- A warning based on the thesis statement;
- A quotation from an authority;
- An anecdote; and
- A rhetorical question that makes the readers think about the writer's main points and so on.

## 3.4 ORGANISING YOUR WRITING

From a writer's point of view, organising involves searching for a pattern or a sequence that is appropriate to your information, your goals and your readers' needs. Your readers expect that you will create a pattern that will make what you say easy to read, understand, remember and be useful.

Once you have determined the relationship among the concepts and data you have gathered, you still have to decide how you will present these to your readers. There are four basic discourse strategies that you could use or adapt to your needs. **Remember, while we are discussing them as separate types of discourse, in a single piece of writing you are likely to use more than one type.**

### 3.4.1 Forms of Discourse

Generally **exposition**, **narration**, **description** and **argumentation** are considered to be the basic forms of discourse. When a writer is concerned with setting forth facts then the form is known as *exposition*, when s/he presents them in terms of temporal action then the form is *narration*, and in terms of space and giving details about it, it is *description*, and when s/he intends to resolve conflict of facts then it is known as *argumentation*. These forms do not exist as pure forms; they, in fact, are intermixed and one can only talk about a dominant form in a piece of writing. Let us look at the dominant forms separately.

#### i) Expository Discourse

Expository writing is probably the most common form of writing. Central to expository writing is *grouping*, *classification*, *definition*, *illustration*, *giving instructions and directions*, *advice*, *processes and systems*. While grouping involves selection, classification involves breaking down of a broad topic into parts. In contrast to these, definition points out the characteristics that distinguish a particular thing under discussion from others. Illustration involves exemplification of ideas under discussion, using examples.

#### Check your progress 3

- 1) Here is a beginning for a paragraph of definition. Complete the paragraph by explaining both the positive and negative sides of liberty as you perceive it.

In the dictionary, liberty is defined as freedom from external restraints or compulsion. The definition is not incorrect but is too narrow, because liberty means freedom from having to do something, as well as freedom to do something. In this sense, liberty may be said to possess two sides – a positive and a negative.

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#### ii) Narrative Discourse

Narration depends chiefly on temporal order, i.e., upon actions in a chronological order. The chronological order involves a sequencing of events or actions from beginning to end. A skilled narrator is able to arrange the details in such a way so that a reader's interest rises to a climax at some point in the narration. The narration, in turn, can range from story telling, as in novels and short stories, to anecdotes used for illustration, explanation or support.

Sometimes, for special effects, etc. an author may begin his/her narration from the end and then through a process of *flashback* may return to the beginning and then give the full events till the end. The author may also begin in the middle of

a chronological sequence, narrate events leading up to the point of narration and then proceed to complete the narration of events. Both the above kinds of presentation of events can generally be found in novels and films.

**Where to look for ideas:**

You can only write about what you have experienced, observed, imagined, and thought about. Although we discuss the experiences and thoughts of others, they do not become our own. The most interesting story or narration is the one you have experienced and thought about in your own individual fashion. A narrative in order to be interesting must be original. The sources for your narratives are:

**Your memories:** What places or persons do you recall clearly? What days do you remember vividly? What was the happiest day you recall? What was the most painful time you remember?

**Your friends and favourite places:** Who is the most peaceful person you know? Who is the most amusing person you know? Which is the place you would like to go back to?

**Events and Participants:** What events in your life did you find most moving? What was the greatest satisfaction or disappointment that you experienced? What people in your life did you consider powerful, good or beautiful? Do you still admire them? What events would you like to wipe out from your memory? What events would you like to remember and relive?

**Imagination and wishes:** if you had your choice, which country would you like to live in? What persons would you like to meet? How would you like your own country to be?

You can devise your plan by asking the following four basic questions:

- i) What is special or typical about my narrative?
- ii) Why am I telling this story?
- iii) What kind of readers am I writing for?
- iv) How will my reader best understand my plan and purpose?

You may find you have three more questions:

- v) How long does my narrative have to be?
- vi) Do I know enough about what I am writing?
- vii) Where can I get more information about it?

In writing narrations one of the skills to be cultivated is style. The question that arises is how you can improve your narrative style. In the initial stages you can consider the following stylistic features:

- a) Simplicity
- b) Conversational style
- c) Individual turn of phrase
- d) Concrete and precise vocabulary

### iii) Descriptive Discourse

Description also involves narration, but of a different kind. It is a kind of picture-making, indicating what someone, something, or some place, etc. looks like. All descriptions involve spatial dimensions.

Any description would involve one of the two possibilities: either the description would proceed from a particular to the general or, from the general to the particular. For example, a description of a scenery could either begin with a central focus on a particular detail and then proceed to other things that relate to it, giving us, thereby, a general picture. One could also describe the scenery in general terms and then focus on particular items within it which are of interest. However, what is common to any kind of description is the spatial arrangement, i.e., the way things appear and the way they are arranged. Carefully study the passage below:

*Punctually at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermillion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his clients took to be a prophetic look and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position – placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks; even a half-wit's eye would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to dahlia stalks. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way: medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, and above all, an auctioneer of cheap cloth, who created enough din all day to awake the whole town.*

**(R. K. Narayan: An Astrologer's Day)**

Here the narration begins with a close description of an astrologer and then goes on to describe the hustle and bustle of the place in general terms.

Now let's look at the precise words/phrases that make this description hold the readers' interest.

- **Being specific**

....a dozen cowrie shells ....

....a square piece of cloth ....

....a saffron coloured turban ....

- **Giving descriptive details**

His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermillion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam....

- **Variation**

...his eyes sparkled...  
...sharp abnormal gleam...  
...prophetic look...  
...power of his eyes...

Note that a description can be of people, places and processes.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) You have been asked by a Tourist/Travel Magazine to introduce your City/Town/Village to foreign visitors. Write a physical description, including the location, layout, geographical and architectural features. Some reference to history may be appropriate. Your description must make your area sound interesting and attractive as a tourist destination. Write in 200 words.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

#### **iv) Argumentative Discourse**

In argumentative discourse the writer argues a case, or expresses an opinion, by looking at a problem from both the sides. Any structure representing argumentation must take into account the pro-and-con nature of the argument. Argumentation can be done in three different ways. First, one can give ones own arguments by taking an affirmative position. Second, one can give further evidence to counter-balance the arguments of an opponent. And, third, one can point out the fallacies in one's opponents' arguments in order to discredit them. Strong argumentation, therefore, demands perceptive reasoning and careful perusal of evidence in order to present one's own arguments or in order to belittle the opponent's arguments. However, this kind of writing becomes interesting when the writer has something to say. Your opinion will not be worth expressing until you have thought about the subject.

#### **Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) Use your imagination and creativity to complete the sentences in the mini-compositions below. Note that 'i' and 'ii' look at both sides of the argument, whereas 'iii' is one-sided and simply lists reasons.

- i) Students often wonder whether it's worth going abroad to study.

It depends on a number of factors:

.....  
Some students: .....

Others, however .....

All in all .....

ii) Many young people dream of becoming famous; but in reality fame has its drawbacks as well as attractions.

On the one hand .....

Also,.....

On the other hand, .....

No only that, but .....

Ultimately.....

iii) There are many reasons why I love .....

One reason is .....

Another .....

What is more,.....

Above all .....

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### 3.5 THE WRITING PROCESS

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So far we have been discussing some of the ways to organise our ideas. But sitting down to write a first draft is much more formal and intimidating than the writing you did while you were planning. Drafts require that you write in complete sentences and paragraphs, and that you pay some attention to the format and the organisation you want the finished product to have. At this stage, you will be coping with questions of length, format, word choice, coherence, sentence structure, cohesion, paragraphing and format. The best way to tackle this is to understand how this process works.

#### 1) Writing the First Draft

Your first draft is an experiment, a test, to find out what you have to say. It is an attempt to build a rough framework of content, meaning, and form which you will improve on later. It is provisional writing. It encourages you to write quickly

in an attempt to delineate the general meaning, content, and organisation of your draft. When you finish you will not have spent so much time and effort that you will be unwilling to change or discard part or all of what you have written.

## **2) Revising the First Draft**

Revising begins with the careful review of your first draft to find out if you have actually done what you set out to do. As a review, you will check how close you have come to achieving your original intention and where and how far you have fallen short of it. You are therefore concerned with:

- what you left out
- what you have included that you do not need
- whether you can make this draft achieve your goals

Remember that revision is a ‘thinking process’ that occurs throughout the writing process. It means looking at your writing with a ‘fresh eye’ i.e. looking at your writing in ways that will make you make more effective choices. As you write, new ideas emerge prompting you to revise what you have planned or have just written. Sometimes, new ideas will encourage you to begin an entirely new draft with a different focus or approach. Remember that revision occurs throughout the writing process.

## **3) Refining**

Once you have settled on the major concepts you wish to include in your first draft and the way you would organise them, you can shift your attention to the next level. Look at your examples, illustrations and evidence. Do these support the main ideas? Do the sub-sections follow each other logically? Do your examples really exemplify and explain? This is a good time to look for gaps in your writing. Is there anything missing? Now is the time to add explanations and details without having to rewrite the whole draft.

## **4) Editing**

Editing is a careful reading of the draft to ensure that everything is the way you wanted it to be and there are no mistakes that you may later regret. Editing will be easier if you know how to go about it and what to look for. Let’s concentrate on what you should look for.

i) **Looking at Paragraphs:** This is the time we ask the following questions:

- Is the paragraphing logical and visually appropriate?
- Is there a topic sentence which states the main idea of the paragraph?
- Are the sentences related to each other?

By this time you have probably stopped adding new material. You are now trying to make your writing concise and clear, sentence by sentence.

ii) **Sentences:** You need to read your text sentence by sentence. Are the sentences related to each other? Are the tenses correct? Is the pronoun referencing correct? Are there any dangling modifiers?

iii) **Vocabulary:** It is a good idea to focus at this stage on the words that you

used. Do the words mean what you want them to mean? Will your readers understand what you wish to state? Does your vocabulary have a vast range? For example do you use words precisely and is there variation in your word choice. Example:

**Precise words:** gaze, glance, stare, glare, and peep

**Variation:** car.... Maruti Zen.....Vehicle....

As well as .... also.... what is more....

- iv) **Format:** The headings should be consistent throughout the draft. That is, all main headings should have the same typography, spacing and placing. All sub-heading should also be alike.
- v) **Indentation** should be consistent throughout the draft.
- vi) **Visual Aids:** Take a close look at all the visual aids including: graphs, charts, tables and drawings. See that they are at the appropriate places in the text. Be sure each visual aid has a title that explains what it is.

## 5) Proofreading

Proofreading is more than re-reading. It is a careful word by word or line by line review of your first draft to make sure that everything is as it should be. We give you some tips and techniques to make your proofreading sessions more effective.

- i) When you proofread, you need to **concentrate**. This means getting rid of distraction and potential interruptions.
- ii) Don't rely entirely on spell check or grammar check on the computer. These programs work with a limited number of rules, so they cannot identify every error.
- iii) Read slowly and read every word.
- iv) Check the punctuation.
- v) Pay attention to capitalisation, missing or extra commas, colons and semi-colons used incorrectly.
- vi) If you are using numbers, check them. We often make a mistake by omitting or adding a zero.
- vii) Finally get somebody else to proofread it once because after a few readings we become blind to our own errors.

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## 3.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have introduced you to the techniques of good writing. We have discussed in some detail the methods of writing i.e. writing a thesis statement, elaborating on it and writing effective introductions and conclusions. We have also introduced you to the various discourse types: expository, descriptive, narrative and argumentative. Finally, we have taken you through the process of writing drafts, refining them, editing and finally proofreading them. We hope you find the unit useful and interesting.

### **3.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS**

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# **UNIT 4 THE LANGUAGE OF FORMAL LETTERS**

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## **Structure**

- 4.1 Objectives
  - 4.2 Introduction: The Language of Formal Letters
  - 4.3 Use a Formal Style
  - 4.4 Tailor Your Style to Get Results
    - 4.4.1 A Personal and Friendly Style
    - 4.4.2 An Impersonal and Indirect Style
  - 4.5 Avoid Overused Phrases
  - 4.6 Make Your Letters Gender Neutral
  - 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
  - 4.8 Further Readings
  - 4.9 Answers
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## **4.1 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we discuss the language we use in formal and informal letters. To a large extent, this will hold good for emails as well. We will deal primarily with the choice of words and phrases, style and tone of formal letters.

## **4.2 INTRODUCTION: THE LANGUAGE OF FORMAL LETTERS**

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The basic phrases (*Dear Sir, Sincerely, Thank you, Best wishes...*) are usually found in a formal letter. These phrases are used as a kind of frame to introduce the content of a letter. By using these standard phrases, you can give a professional tone to letters in English. In this unit we will look at the language and content of formal letters: letters to offices or business houses or to professionals.

In this age of advanced electronic communications, composing a well-crafted letter is no less important than it was earlier. We still depend on letters as a means of communicating our professional, business or consumer interests. Our letters frequently express a point of view, make a case, register an opinion or profess a need. This requires the writer's language to be ***precise, formal, friendly*** and ***polite***. This mode of a letter may be paper mail or email.

## **4.3 USE A FORMAL STYLE**

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Let us first begin with an exercise to show you what we mean by a formal style, and how this is different from the style we use in friendly personal letters we write to our relatives, parents, and friends.

Look at the box given below. The box has words and expressions with similar meanings, but with a different “register” or style. One set of expressions is used

in informal letters and the other in formal letters.

	<b>Informal</b>	<b>Formal</b>
a)	Hi	Dear
b)	putting me up	your hospitality
c)	when I was in	during my visit to
d)	Sorry	please accept my apologies
e)	that I haven't written	for not writing to
f)	when I got back	on my return
g)	workmates	colleagues
h)	go on	proceed
i)	straight away	immediately
j)	great that you are able	very kind of you
k)	pass on	convey
l)	thanks	gratitude

The dictionary often gives you information about whether a word or expression is formal or informal.

Now let us do a task that has been adapted from an online dictionary. If you are confident using the net, you can visit different sites of Macmillan, Oxford, Cambridge Dictionary and so on.

*Can you now complete these letters with the expressions above? First, try to find out by quickly reading the letter, whether the letter is an informal or a formal one. It is easy to fill in the blanks once you have identified the style of the letter. You may add some words of your own. You may also omit some words.*

Peers House Sardar Patel Road New Delhi  (a) ..... Parimal,  I am writing to thank you for (b) ..... (c) ..... Hyderabad last week. Please accept my apologies (d) ..... earlier, but I have been busy with work (e) .....  It was (f) ..... and your (g) ..... to meet me and your comments and suggestions were very useful and informative. I am confident we can now (h) ..... with the EDF project (i) .....	Peers House Sardar Patel Road New Delhi  (a) ..... Parimal,  Just a short note to say thanks a million for (b) ..... (c) ..... Hyderabad last week. Sorry (d) ..... before now, but I've been pretty busy with things since (e) .....  I had a great few days with you and it was (f) ..... to show me around where you work. It was really interesting to see what you do and I thought your (g) ..... were really funny. Well, for me, it's back to my studies. I need to
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<p>Thank you again for your invaluable input and please (j) ..... my (k) ..... to your colleagues.</p> <p>With best wishes, Hussein Fida</p>	<p>(h) ..... with writing up my project (i) .....</p> <p>Please say hi to your housemates and (j) ..... my (k) ..... to them for letting me stay.</p> <p>Love, Hussein Fida</p>
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As you can see, the choice of words and expressions change the register of the letters completely. When we write for professional, official purposes, we use a formal style.

### Text A

Hi Maya,

**It's been a while since we wrote**, so I thought **I'd drop you a line** to bring you up to date with what's been happening here. Nalin got a **fantastic job** in January. That means we can relax a little. I still don't have what I really want work wise, but it will happen soon. You have to stay positive, **don't you?**

My parents are both fine, and think they are really happy that we've moved back to Delhi. For us, it's great to be so close to family again, an extra sense of comfort and security.

So, **what about you these days**? Are you still stuck in that old job? Since I've been having so much trouble getting a job I understand your reluctance to change. There is nothing worse than filling in endless application forms, with no idea of what it will lead to. **Anyway**, I've got another form to fill in so I'll end now.

**Love,**  
Payal

### Text B

TO: Sales Department Members

FROM: H.C. Chambers

SUBJECT: Monthly Results

The numbers are in and **I am proud to inform you that** our total sales for the period of April 15th through May 15th amount to 5358,466.00, **which represents** a 10% increase over our sales for the preceding period.

You have achieved the goal we established in the first week of April, and **you are all to be highly commended for your achievement**. Congratulations!

As we have shown in the table, formal letter writing is different from the chatty, conversational style we use in our friendly email messages. That is, we normally do not use slang and colloquial expressions like "guy", "bloke", "I was cheesed off" in formal letters. But the language of formal letters is also different from the specialized language we find in legal contracts and reports. In the majority of formal official letters and email messages we write and receive, we find a style between these two extremes.

Read these three letters, and pay close attention to the language each of them uses. Text A is an informal letter written to a friend by another friend. Text B is a formal email written by the Head to his team members in a Sales department. Text C is an extract from a very formal legal document on copyright.

Now read the Text C

#### ASSIGNMENT OF COPYRIGHT

FOR VALUE RECEIVED, the undersigned hereby sells, transfers and assigns unto its successors and personal representatives, all right, title and interest in and to the following described copyright... The certificate of copyright is attached.

The undersigned warrants good title to said copyright, that it is free to all liens, encumbrances or any known claims against said copyright.

Signed under seal this \_ day of \_\_, 20\_\_.

Always remember, writing that is too formal can sound unfriendly, and an overly obvious attempt to be causal and informal may strike the reader as insincere or unprofessional. In using a formal style, we have to ensure that your style is businesslike without being stuffy. The tone should suggest that you are sensible, objective, interested in facts and courteous.

#### Check Your Progress 1

Decide if the following expression comes from a formal or informal letter. Write F (formal) or I (informal) after each sentence.

- 1) I'll finish now as I'm running out of space.
- 2) Thank you for sending me your brochure.
- 3) Sorry for not writing for so long.
- 4) If you have any further questions, please contact me again.
- 5) I must apologize for not contacting you sooner.
- 6) I look forward to hearing from you.
- 7) I'd better finish.
- 8) Write again soon!
- 9) I wish to apply for the post of Call auditor at ACER Industries, that was advertised in The India Times on 22 March.
- 10) It was lovely to hear from you.
- 11) Best wishes.
- 12) It was great to get your letter.
- 13) Good luck!
- 14) I wish to complain about the terrible service at your restaurant.
- 15) I am writing with reference to your letter...

## 4.4 TAILOR YOUR STYLE TO GET RESULTS

We have seen that formal letters limit our options about the kind of language to use. But we do still vary our style depending on the purpose of the letter. Sometimes we want to make an impact, so we adopt *a forceful style*. At other times, we find that *a passive style* is preferable. Sometimes, when we are selling or promoting a product, we find *a personal style* works wonders. In making a complaint, *an impersonal style* sounds less offensive. Sometimes, especially in letters thanking and congratulating people, a style where we use many adjectives is more apt.

Style is the way we use words to achieve a certain tone, or an overall impression. We can vary our style — our sentence structure, the vocabulary — to sound forceful or passive, personal or impersonal. The right choice depends on the **purpose** of the message and our **relationship** with the reader.

The first step toward getting the tone right is to think about your relationship with the reader. Who are you and who are they? Are you friends of longstanding or are you total strangers? Is the reader your senior (in age, occupation and experience) or your equal?

Though formal letters are not conversational, they definitely have to be friendly. What do we mean by the term ‘friendly’? Friendliness in official discourse suggests that we show a consideration for the reader/the receiver. If we just stop and think how the other person is likely to receive your communication, we will be able to prevent misunderstandings, and will make sure that it doesn’t offend our readers. The simple test we need to use here is: “How would I feel if I receive this letter? Would I want to answer this letter?”

The second test is to take time to consider the purpose of our letter. Obviously, we want the message to reach our audience, and we will probably want the reader to take some action in response to our message. Once we are clear about the message and how we wish to express it, the tone of our letter will become clear.

For example Mr. Hussain wants to accept a job which he has been offered. But he is unsure of the tone he should take in the message. He asks himself, “What do I want to say in my letter? I want to inform them that I have decided to accept the position, I want to thank the company for the offer, and also establish goodwill with my new co-workers.” So Mr. Hussain is quite clear what he wants to say in his letter, so he assumes a tone that shows that he is happy about the offer, and is enthusiastic about beginning a new job.

- Knowing what to say and
- Knowing how to say it

May 20, 2.....

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2... offering me the post of Technical Supervisor in your company.

I am happy to accept your offer and be a part of your team. I look forward to working in the organization to the best of my ability.

I will be able to join in two weeks' time.

Thank you,

Yours faithfully

Shahid Hussain

In the next section, we will try to illustrate different circumstances, where a particular style seems to be more effective than others. We will give you examples of the following styles we use in formal letters

- A personal and friendly style
- An impersonal and indirect style

#### **4.4.1 A Personal and Friendly Style**

Today, the world has changed, and we find that sales promotion letters from banks, credit card companies and shopping malls use language which is personalized. These companies know that readers would want to read a letter if they feel that there is someone at the other end of the letter (the writer, or the company) who is taking notice and showing some interest in their concerns. Read this letter, and see how the writer (here, ICICI bank) has personalized the letter.

Dear Customer,

*At ICICI bank we have always understood the value of your time.*

*That's why we have recently introduced the one-stop, single point FAST FORWARD service, especially for privileged customers like you.* As an esteemed customer with a quarterly average balance of Rs. 1,00,000 and above, we are sure you will welcome special facilities aimed at saving time and enhancing your experience with ICICI bank. Our FAST FORWARD service is intended to make banking easy, convenient and fast.

*How does it work? Simple!* To avail of this service, *all you have to do is* head for the fast forward service counter at your branch and show your FAST FORWARD privilege card. This service is available to you whenever *you visit us* for your banking needs.

I am confident that you will find our FAST FORWARD service convenient and prompt. *I look forward to helping you grow your business.*

Warm regards,

Anup Bagchi

General Manager

The letter sounds friendly and personalized, it makes the reader feel good and doesn't sound like a computer-generated routine letter (though it is!). How does the letter achieve this tone? It uses ***I, you and we*** with ease, and not the third person or the impersonal 'the ICICI bank'. The first line of the letter could have been a very impersonal "The ICICI bank understands the value of the customer's

time.” Instead it uses “at ICICI bank, we...” and “of your time”. The letter also uses a direct active voice. It uses questions and easy-to-understand language (“How does it work?”). The letter refrains from overusing the passive voice (like “Our fast forward is intended to...”).

When we use words such as **I, we, you, your, my, and our** in letters, our writing becomes much more readable. A personal style exudes warmth, and sounds just like one human being talking to another.

However, the use of personal pronouns like **I** and **you**, **may not sound proper in a letter of complaint**. Compare:

You have not paid your telephone bill. When can you pay it?

The bill has not been paid. Kindly let us know by which date it can be paid.

The second (*The bill has not been paid.*) sounds less accusing and offensive.

Therefore, if you feel that you need **a personal and friendly tone** in your letter, you may:

- Use personal pronouns, especially: **we** and **you**, when saying positive things
- Use the active voice
- Use short sentences that capture the rhythm of ordinary conversation
- Direct questions at the reader

### Check your progress 2

A) Given below are some phrases from letters. How will you make them sound less impersonal?

- 1) The customers will appreciate the fact that the company is giving a 10% discount on computers this month.
  - 2) Further to your recent communication, please find enclosed the requested quotation.
  - 3) If the customers have any further questions they should contact the company at 9886745612.
  - 4) It was discovered that the salary totals were incorrect.
  - 5) The list of the names and the number of people attending the course has not been finalized.
- .....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**B) Rewrite this letter to make it sound more friendly and personal.**

Your letter requesting information about our scholarship has been received in the director's office. Please be advised, however, that in order for this office to respond to your inquiry, appropriate forms must be completed. Accordingly, your letter is being returned to you, and if you want the information being sought, another letter with the enclosed forms that are being sent to you, must be mailed to the above address.

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#### **4.4.2 An Impersonal and Indirect Style**

We have said that a personal and direct letter is usually good to receive, but this is not true of all occasions. Read the following letter:

I regret to inform you that we must reject your application for admission into our law programme. We cannot accept your application because you were supposed to send it on or before July 9. We have stated this clearly in our college catalogue. We have also printed this information on the application form.

We have made every effort to prevent late applications therefore we cannot make any exceptions. We deeply regret any inconvenience associated with your reply.

Would you like to receive this kind of letter? The letter is in a style so direct that it may offend the reader. The statements — we must *reject*... we *cannot make exceptions*, *you were supposed to*... are blunt statements that are likely to cause pain and anger. In giving bad news, a personal style of this kind can be offensive. Now read a revised version of this letter:

Your application to our law school programme cannot be accepted. The refusal is based on the fact that all applications must be received before July 9. This policy is clearly stated in our catalogue and has also been printed on the application forms.

In writing bad news letters (refusing permission, declining requests, making complaints) it is often better to use an indirect and impersonal style.

## **Check Your Progress 3**

Given below are two letters of complaint. Read them and do the tasks that follow.

Letter A	Letter B
<p>To: vijayashree@rediffmail.com          From: sureshkv@sanchar.net.in          Subject: Overdue payment</p> <p>Dear Ms. Vijayashree,</p> <p>This is to inform you that our records indicate that you have not paid your bill for the Internet service and it is more than 60 days overdue. Because you haven't responded to our repeated letters and phone calls, we have no choice but to discontinue your service if you do not make the payment within five business days.</p> <p>If you would like us to continue to be your Internet service provider you should make a payment on or before January 3. If not, we will terminate your service as of that date. Perhaps you need to review your accounting system?</p> <p>Regards,          K V Suresh          Account Manager</p>	<p>To: vijayashree@rediffmail.com          From: sureshkv@sanchar.net.in          Subject: Overdue payment</p> <p>Dear Ms. Vijayashree,</p> <p>This is to inform you that our records indicate that your payment for Internet service is more than 60 days overdue and our attempts to contact you by phone and letters have been unsuccessful. As per policy, your service will be discontinued if a payment is not received within five business days.</p> <p>Kindly make the payment on or before January 3. We look forward to a continued association with you.</p> <p>Regards,          K V Suresh          Account Manager</p>

- A) List the common factual information given in both the letters.
- .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

- B) What is the difference in language? Complete the columns:

Fact	Language of Letter A	Language of Letter B
<b>payment not received</b>	<i>you have not paid your bill for the Internet service</i>	<i>that your payment for Internet service is more than 60 days overdue</i>

C) Which letter do you think is less offensive? And Why?

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## 4.5 AVOID OVERUSED PHRASES

Many people write in too formal a style which contains tired overused phrases like *We acknowledge receipt of...., after careful consideration...., Enclosed herewith, I am writing this letter to inform you....* One of the common failings of such writing is either using words that are unnecessary or using wordy phrases when a much shorter phrase would do.

Writing in plain simple English makes it easier to understand, and saves the reader's (and the writer's) time. Writing in simple English means cutting out useless words and phrases. Look at the following examples with the unnecessary words in bold.

....During **the course of** investigations

also, **it should be mentioned** that many people...

Allow a few days **to elapse** before speaking with....

**You should** contact....

Instead you could say:

...During the investigations

...many people

...Please wait before speaking with

...Please contact

Similarly, we can use single words for some overused phrases. For example, we can use 'soon' instead of 'at an early date' and 'until' for 'until such time that'.

There are also many words we use that have simpler, clearer or less formal equivalents. We can use the simple word 'get' for the formal word 'obtain', and 'help' for 'assistance'. The simpler, familiar words put us and our readers on the same plane; longer, abstract words make it more difficult to achieve understanding. The American author and humorist Mark Twain once worked as a journalist and he was paid seven cents a word for his articles. He clearly expressed his rules for successful writing when he said "*I never write metropolis for seven cents, because I can get the same price for city*".

A) Rewrite these wordy phrases in simpler English.

- 1) In the course of ...
- 2) During such time that ...
- 3) In spite of the fact that ...
- 4) Anything over and above this ...
- 5) For a period of 14 days ...
- 6) Up to a maximum of four people ...
- 7) It would be appreciated if you would...
- 8) I am writing with reference to....
- 9) At this moment in time ...
- 10) In accordance with your request ...

B) Try to write the following sentences in simpler English:

- 1) The duty of a clerk is to check all incoming mail and to record it.
- 2) The current focus of the medical profession is disease prevention.
- 3) A shortage of tellers at our branch office on Friday and Saturday during rush hours has caused customers to become dissatisfied with the service.
- 4) She has the ability to influence the outcome.
- 5) It is necessary that we take a stand on this pressing issue.

## 4.6 MAKE YOUR LETTERS GENDER NEUTRAL

**Try solving this riddle:** A young man is rushed to hospital after a road accident. He is taken to the operating theatre immediately for an emergency operation but the surgeon takes one look at the patient and says “I cannot operate on this man, he’s my son”. The surgeon is not the patient’s father. Who is the surgeon?

Language and society reflect one another. It is important for us as communicators to recognize and respect change in the meaning and acceptability of words. Today, with the changing roles of men and women, our awareness and use of language also needs to change. Did you know that in Old English, the word girl meant a young person of either sex? Now we would think it rather odd if we heard someone referring to a boy as ‘hey, girl.’ Just as you would not use girl with its outdated meaning, you should not use other words that do not accurately represent the people we are addressing.

Do you think using a gender-neutral language is necessary? Or do you think it is just an attempt at being politically correct, and should be taken too seriously? Read the information in the box to see the way communication is perceived by people in the workplace today.

The English word girl (first documented in 1290) originally designated a child of either sex. To differentiate between the two genders, a female child was called a gay girl, while a male child was called a knave girl. During the 14th century its sense was narrowed to specifically female children. Subsequently, it was extended to refer also to mature but unmarried young women since the 1530s. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl>

Let's take another example. Since the majority of physicians historically have been male and most secretaries female, the cultural habit is to refer to all physicians as he and all secretaries as she when their particular gender is not known. One might state,

Several years ago I received a cover letter and resume for an open position, The cover letter was addressed to the “The Marketing Director”, but the salutation was “Dear Sir.” I was stunned. That this person clearly assumed the Marketing Director was a male stunned me. I did keep the resume and cover letter on my desk for a couple of days, but only to show my colleagues. I did not consider the writer fit for my department and did not respond to his application.

“Tomorrow I will meet my new doctor; I hope he is friendly. I don’t know his secretary either —I hope she’s efficient.”

However, unless one is certain that the new doctor is male, it would be better to alter the sentence so it does not use the gendered pronoun “he”. Options might include:

- “Tomorrow I will meet my new doctor, who I hope is friendly.”
- “Tomorrow I will meet my new doctor; I hope the doctor is friendly.”
- “Tomorrow I will meet my new doctor: I hope he or she is friendly.”

The pronouns ***he, his, him, and himself*** should be used only when referring to a male person. It is not acceptable now to use all masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to both men and women. Such language is considered sexist. It is safer to use the plural pronoun (***they, their, themself***): ***he/she, him/her, himself/herself*** or use ***you***, in letters.

Human resources has replaced *manpower*, *mail carrier* has replaced mailman, and *chair* or *chairperson* has replaced chairman. We now commonly use flight attendant instead of steward or stewardess, and salesperson or sales representative to replace salesman or saleswoman.

Instead of a lady doctor, it is better to say a doctor because lady doctor implies that doctors are usually male. Similarly instead of an actress it is better to say an actor. Also, we should try to avoid stereotyping. For example, instead of ‘both the applicant and his wife should sign’ we should use ‘Both the applicant and spouse should sign’ because the applicant can be a man or a woman.

### Check Your Progress 5

**Here are some sentences which you can revise to make them gender neutral.**

- 1) If the researcher is the principal investigator, he should place an asterisk after his name.

- 2) The driver should submit his completed form at the registration counter.
- 3) Each supervisor should be at his workstation by 8 a.m.
- 4) If a student is late in enrolling, he must pay an additional fee.
- 5) A teacher must communicate clearly with her students.
- 6) The writer should use his own judgment in this regard.
- 7) Professors and their wives are invited to the Presidential dinner.
- 8) Please consult your gynaecologist for her opinion.
- 9) The authoress, Jane Seymour, hosted a book signing at Barnes and Noble.
- 10) Kindly send a copy to your Chairman for his approval.

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## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, you have learnt to write short business letters. Formal letters should be formal, polite and friendly. You must make sure that they are gender neutral and give a positive message. In fact, all business communications must have these features. I hope you have attempted all the exercises. This will help you improve your business communication style.

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## 4.8 FURTHER READINGS

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Bhatia, V. and Bremmer, S. (2012). English for Business Communication. *Language Teaching*, 45(4), 410-445.

Kaushik, J. C. and Sinha, K. K. (es.), (1991). *English for Students of Commerce*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Poe, F. W. (1993). *McGraw-Hill Handbook of Business Letter Writing*. New York; McGraw-Hill.

Monippally, M. M. (1997). *The Craft of Business Letter Writing*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill.

Soyinka, W. (2005). Telephone Conversation. In H. Raghunathan et. Al. (Eds), *The Individual and Society* (pp. 121-122). New Delhi: Pearson.

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## 4.9 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) I'll finish now as I'm running out of space. (I)
- 2) Thank you for sending me your brochure. (F)
- 3) Sorry for not writing for so long. (I)
- 4) If you have any further questions, please contact me again. (F)
- 5) I must apologize for not contacting you sooner. (F)
- 6) I look forward to hearing from you. (F)
- 7) I'd better finish. (I)

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- 8) Write again soon! (I)
- 9) I wish to apply for the post of Call auditor at ACER Industries, that was advertised in The India Times on 22 March. (F)
- 10) It was lovely to hear from you. (I)
- 11) Best wishes. (F/I)
- 12) It was great to get your letter. (I)
- 13) Good luck! (I)
- 14) I wish to complain about the terrible service at your restaurant.(F)
- 15) I am writing with reference to your letter... (F)

**Check Your Progress 2**

A)

- 1) As a customer, you will be happy to know that the company is giving a 10% discount on computers this month.
  - 2) Thank you for contacting us. I enclose the quotation you asked for.
  - 3) If you have any questions, please contact us at 9886745612.
  - 4) We discovered that the salary totals were incorrect.
  - 5) We have not finalized the list of the names and the number of people attending the course.
- B) Thank you for your letter to our director asking for information about our scholarship. You need to complete the appropriate forms so that we can respond to your enquiry. We are therefore returning your letter. We enclose the forms that you need to complete. Kindly write back to us, enclosing your filled-in-forms.

**Check your progress 3**

A) List the common factual information given in both the letters.

- 1) payment is overdue
- 2) no response to emails and telephone calls
- 3) termination of service if payment is not made
- 4) payment to be made on or before January 3.

B) Differences in language

<b>Payment not received</b>	you have not paid your bill for the Internet service	that your payment for Internet service is more than 60 days overdue
<b>no response</b>	you haven't responded to our repeated letters and phone calls	our attempts to contact you by phone and letters have been unsuccessful
<b>termination of service</b>	your service will be discontinued if payment is not received...	we have no choice but to discontinue your service if you do not make a payment

C. Letter B is more polite and less offensive, because it is written in an impersonal and indirect style. Letter A sounds harsh and is written in a tone which is accusing and threatening.

#### Check Your Progress 4

A)

- 1) During
- 2) Till
- 3) Despite/ in spite of
- 4) anything over this
- 5) For 14 days
- 6) Up to four people
- 7) Please...
- 8) I am writing about
- 9) At present
- 10) As requested

B)

- 1) The clerk must check all incoming mail and record it.
- 2) The medical profession currently focuses on disease prevention.
- 3) A teller shortage at our branch office on Friday and Saturday during rush hours has caused customer dissatisfaction.
- 4) She can influence the outcome.
- 5) We must take a stand on this pressing issue.

#### Check Your Progress 5

- 1) An asterisk may be placed after the principal investigator's name.
- 2) **Drivers** should submit **their** completed forms at the registration counter.
- 3) **Supervisors** should be at **their** workstations by 8 a.m.
- 4) Students enrolling late must pay an additional fee.
- 5) **Teachers** must communicate clearly with **their** students.
- 6) **Writers** should use **their** own judgment in this regard.
- 7) Professors and their **spouses** are invited to the Presidential dinner.
- 8) Please consult your gynaecologist for **his/her** opinion. (or Please get the gynaecologist's opinion.)
- 9) The **author** Jane Seymour, hosted a book signing at Barnes and Noble.
- 10) Kindly send a copy to your **Chairperson** for approval.